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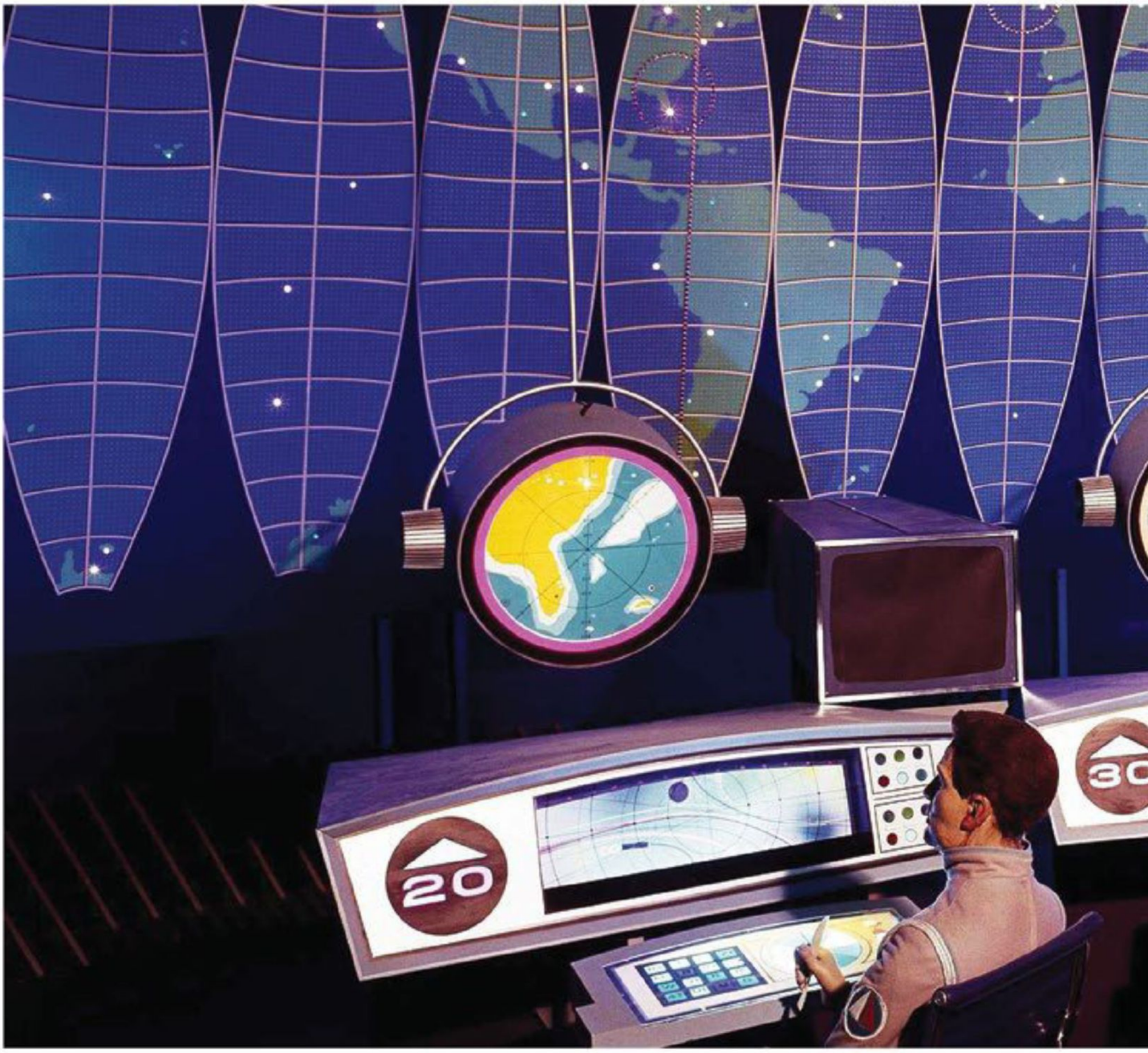

ACROSS THE WORLD

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STARBURST

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NOVEMBER 2014

EDITORIAL

Editor
JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Editor
MARTIN UNSWORTH
martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com

Honorary Editor-in-Chief
DEZ SKINN

Reviews Editor
JULIAN WHITE

Original Fiction Editor
RYLAN CAVELL
rylan.cavell@starburstmagazine.com

Editorial Assistants
KIERON MOORE
JACK BOTTOMLEY

ART

Collectors Edition Cover Artist
PAUL LOUDON
paulloudon.com

Art Director
JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Art Director
SHAUNA ASKEW
shauna.askew@starburstmagazine.com

PRESS

Press Liaison
PHIL PERRY
phil.perry@starburstmagazine.com

Event Correspondent
ANDREW KEATES
andrew.keates@cabbell.co.uk

THE GREATEST WRITING TEAM IN THE UNIVERSE

Head Writer
PAUL MOUNT
paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com

Lead Writers
VANESSA BERBEN, JACK BOTTOMLEY, MARTYN CONTERIO, DOMINIC CUTHBERT, KATE FATHERS, ED FORTUNE, JOEL HARLEY, CHRIS JACKSON, CHRISTIAN JONES, TONY JONES, GRANT KEMPSTER, JOHN KNOTT, ANDREW MARSHALL, IAIN MCNALLY, KIERON MOORE, STUART MULRAIN, ROBIN PIERCE, ANDREW POLLARD, CAROLINE PREECE, LEE PRICE, PAUL RISKER, IAIN ROBERTSON, CALLUM SHEPHARD, JR SOUTHALL, NICK SPACEK, ADAM STARKEY, ROB TALBOT, PETE TURNER, MARTIN UNSWORTH

Contributors
SOPHIE ATHERTON, DAVID BAGSHAW, JENNIE BAILEY, PHIL BERESFORD, SIMON BESSON, NICK BLACKSHAW, P.M. BUCHAN, NEIL BUCHANAN, ABIGAIL CHANDLER, ALISTER DAVISON, SPLEENY DOTSON, CARA FIELDER, ZACHARY FOX, JD GILLAM, ANDY HALL, CHRIS HOLT, ANIMAL JOHNS, ROBERT KEELING, IAN MAT, KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN, NEIL MCNALLY, HAYDEN MEARS, JACKSON NASH, MICHAEL NOBLE, PADDY O'HARE, CLEAVER PATTERSON, LUKE RILEY, LAURA ROBINSON, WHITNEY SCOTT-BAIN, DANIEL SEDDON, KAL SHANAHAN, JON TOWLSON, SCOTT VARNHAM, DAVID WHALLEY, CHAD WHITAKER, ALED WILLIAMS, ZACK THE ZOMBABY

ONLINE

Editor
MARTIN UNSWORTH
martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Editor
ANDREW POLLARD
andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com

Webmaster
JIM BOON
jim@starburstmagazine.com

ADVERTISING

Advertising Director
ANDREW KEATES
020 3603 4950
andrew.keates@cabbell.co.uk

REVIEW MATERIALS

Please send all review materials to:
STARBURST MAGAZINE
PO BOX 4508
MANCHESTER
M61 0GY

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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subscriptions@starburstmagazine.com

LIZARD

STARBURST HQ is grateful for the protection of our faithful lizard TETSUO. A rebel survivor from the Icke Reptilian Wars of the '80s, TETSUO remains vigilant to this day, upholding his promise to protect all of mankind from the ever present threat of reptilian evil.

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STARBURST PUBLISHING
2nd Floor, 60 Portland Street, Manchester. M1 4QT

EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 406.

To genre fans of a certain age Adam West is *their* Batman. It's easy post-Nolan to dismiss any version of the Dark Knight that doesn't involve some serious brooding and introspection. I must confess to myself embracing Tim Burton's 1989 movie as a massive step forward at the time, but there has always been the camp spectre of the show that made all this possible. In 1966 Adam West & co literally saved the Batman comics from cancellation, and triggered "Batmania" around the world. Now for awhile some of us have been a little ungracious, and dismissive of this creation of the swinging sixties. It's true that we have moved on, and that the sixties **Batman** could never belong to our current era, but it's really entertaining. Cast off your inhibitions and get ready to do the Batusi, 'cos they've only gone and released it on Blu-ray at long last. It's hard to believe that it took until 2014 to finally be able to own one of the most important genre TV series of the 20th century. If you think I'm over egging the pudding, just remember that at the tail end of the sixties the success of **Batman** on TV got millions of kids back into reading comic books. Those guys now run the networks that shows like **Arrow** are commissioned by. **Batman** is silly, camp, and sometimes unreasonably weird, but grab a few friends and get watching these Blu-rays. What better antidote to some of the things that are happening in the real world at the moment.

We have also done our bit to get you in the mood with a guide to the camp insanity of **Batman** and a look at the future of the character (other than **Gotham** it's awesome!). We also have all your favourites, a preview of **Interstellar**, the conclusion of our Shaune Harrison interview, and a special look at the amazing documentary – **Filmed In Supermarionation.** All this and much, much, more. Also on a personal note, my mate Jamie Anderson is trying to get one of Gerry's last projects completed. Go to Kickstarter and pledge something towards the awesome **Firestorm**. How cool will it be to help get a Gerry Anderson modern classic on our television sets? Extremely cool, of course!

Keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
EDITOR

FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:
STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO Box 4508, Manchester, M61 0GY
or email: **letters@starburstmagazine.com**

VIDEO ASTRAY

Friends,
I go back almost to your first issues and have a VHS Video magazine of yours, a Volume 2, with George Takei on the front with 7 stories on the hour long tape. Have you made this accessible online in any form, like from a website or Facebook???? Would love that for special reasons...
Thanks for all the Gerry Anderson pieces and cast and crew interviews since the late '70s.

Doug Pelton, via email

STAR LETTER

COCK VS. ZOMBIES

Another zombie countdown, another inexplicable high rating for *Shaun of the Dead* which apparently has only *Dawn of the Dead* above it in the pantheon of zombie classics. Seriously? I can understand The Guardian or Empire continuing to give an under the table handjob to Edgar Wright and his chums but STARBURST? I thought you guys had the power of independent thought? But here you are you seriously expecting me to swallow the idea that an extrapolation from "*Spaced*" that fails to be as funny as the original TV episode is somehow a better zombie epic than *Night of the Living Dead*, *Day of the Dead*, *The Beyond* and all the other classics on your list. Have you suddenly started drinking organic e-beer and listening to Coldplay? Are you all working your way through a re-watch of "*Friends*" box sets? Wake up and grow some bloody bollocks gentlemen before you turn into Sci-Fi Now.

Mike "The Cock" Coldwell, via email

What!? We do have the power of independent thought, the #2 was actually a typo that was supposed to say SHAUNA OF THE DEAD, starring Starburst Shauna.

Doug, there is a way. But it is a dangerous journey! The legend goes, that if you take the quest to Mt.Maplin and ask the masters with the cloaks, they can grant you the right cable to transfer this ancient chronicle to your computer device. But only if the moon is full... and you go between the hours of 9 and 5... 4 on a Sunday. Good luck my friend.

CLOWN TO EARTH

I absolutely loved the interview with The Chiodo Brothers, whose film *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* has to be the king of the B-Movies, I watched it recently on Blu-ray and my god it's still fun. Then again the day pies (with a cherry on top of course) or a carnival UFO stop being fun is the day I think the earth is done for. Great interview guys...

Jack, LEEDS

That'd be a hell of a way to go! Sounds good to us! Better than the Plague anyhow! We love The Chiodo Brothers too!

BRAIN FOOD

I enjoyed the zombie issue immensely and after going through your Top 50 I think I have developed a craving for brains. I can't seem to get enough of *Eggheads*, *QI* and *Mars Attacks* ever since.

Phillip, ILKLEY

Just don't put that Freeview channel on, Challenge! You'll overdose! We will not be held responsible! And remember, make sure you get a balanced diet of brains AND brawn. We can recommend Wrestling, it satisfies every need. Or mix your muscles with horror like in SEE NO EVIL 2, featured on page 44 in our interview with the Soska Sisters.

SHUT THAT DOOR

I have been searching for the email address to contact the Blue Box Podcast. I can't find an address also it is not mentioned in the podcast and not in the show notes on the podcast app. This seems to be the hardest podcast ever to contact.

I would like to comment on the *Robot of Sherwood* episode no one mentioned the open TARDIS closed TARDIS during the spoon fight. This drove me nuts watching the fight.

Richard, via email

Now if the Doctor had heard your distress... he would go back in time and write the Blue Box Podcast email address on the TARDIS door for you. #timeywimey
Good job we're here to prescribe this for you... blueboxpodcast@yahoo.co.uk

MASS DEBATE

I had a serious question about these dual covers - do you guys ever have office debates over which one is better? I mean, with some- like the *TMNT* issue- it's no contest but with others (those *Dame to Kill For* covers) there must be a strong debate between you guys. I digress, loved the undead issue (and yes I liked one cover more- but I ain't telling, lol).

Emma, SCARBOROUGH

Yes we do, but the good thing is, we can have one of each and not have to decide!

Wow the artwork cover of *The Walking Dead* issue was superb! It's a genuine work of art, it should be hung in a gallery!

Jane, Newcastle, via email

TOP OF THE ROTH'S

First of all thanks for expanding my knowledge of zombie films, that was quite a Top 50... and I couldn't even think of 10?! Secondly, I just wondered if you were ever planning a Kaiju issue maybe to celebrate *Godzilla 2* down the line? I'd love to see more genres get the Top 50 treatment.

Mario, MANCHESTER

We're all big Godzilla fans here so you'll just have to wait and see! We're not so sure about the name "GODZILLA 2: Down The Line", sounds like this time he's gonna wreak havoc as a computer hacker!

We're dead glad you liked the top 50 Mario, our team enjoyed putting it together and I'm sure we will be doing more in the future. These type of things can be quite divisive, not everyone felt the sameway as you!

SKINTALLY CLAD

I have to say I am disappointed, where on Earth was *Strippers vs. Zombies* in your list, OK, so it's grade-A cack and I have seen more acting quality in an X Factor audition but... wait a minute, I think I have lost this argument, haven't I?

John, EDINBURGH

We know what you mean John, just because it didn't make our list and is a bit of a stinker doesn't mean it isn't worth a watch... on a lonely dark night.

THE WA_KING DEAD

What an amazing issue *The Walking Dead* one was. That Top 50 had quite a few films I'd not heard of, so I'll definitely be tracking them down. I love that you seem to be packing so much content in, each issue seems bigger and bigger in my hand!

Lee, via email

Perhaps it is! Or perhaps your hands are slowly shrinking, or maybe *wearing* away.

DRAGON SLEIGH

Is it just me or does George R.R. Martin look like Santa? I love that hat he wears too. Next time you talk to him will you ask where he got it? I bet he has a pocket full of Murray Mints too...

Brian, via email

Now that you mention it... and we never can get hold of him in December!

CLOCKSTOPPERS

Just wanted to say how sad I was to read that Kris Heys was leaving the magazine. As a regular listener to the STARBURST radio show, I've always found him to be very witty and seems a lovely chap. I would like to wish him well for the future, and much happiness. #lame

Gina, via email

He is! It will be hard but we will do our best to keep up our pun quota without Kris. #punnerd

twitter

@STARBURST_MAG

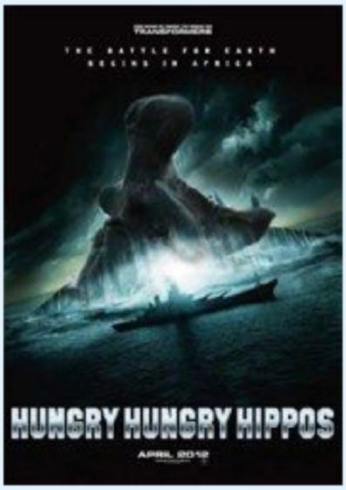
We said...
Tetris movie in the works.

You said:
@Cornervizion *Could be interesting even "Arty" if they can pull it off. At least Michael Bay won't be involved :)*

@save_us_DaJ *I've not got high hopes about how this'll turn out. You might say I'm bricking myself...*

@dmgice *That better star Dolph Lundgren, The Rock, and Nick Cage.*

That news made us dig out this old favourite...



@Daarck1 *somewhere, a movie exec just noticed this and jizzed.*

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE BEST (AND WORST) OF THIS MONTH'S MOVIE / TV NEWS

TWIN PEAKS

After endless speculation it was finally announced that David Lynch and Mark Frost's seminal TV show **Twin Peaks** will be returning to the small screen. The nine-episode series will air on Showtime in the States, and will be set in the present day. In the official announcement, Lynch and Frost said, "*The mysterious and special world of **Twin Peaks** is pulling us back. We're very excited. May the forest be with you.*" While no details have been given about casting or plot, just knowing some long-standing mysteries may be resolved is exciting enough. The pair will co-write the entire series with Lynch directing every episode.

I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE - DÉJÀ-VU

Camille Keaton is to return to the role which made her a household name… OK, the only role anyone remembers her for. In the first direct sequel to Meir Zarchi's notorious 1978 shocker, **I Spit on Your Grave**, Keaton reprises her role as Jennifer Hills, who has since written a memoir of her ordeal and the subsequent trial during which she was accused of taking the law into her own hands, brutally murdering the four rapists who savaged her. Their families, meanwhile, are angry that the court found her not guilty and decide to take justice into their own hands.

The project, entitled **I Spit on Your Grave - Déjà Vu** is written by Zarchi himself, who directs with Chad Ferrin and Terry Zarchi taking up their roles as producers. Although spawning an unnecessary remake in 2010 – which had its own even more redundant sequel in 2012 – the original film is still somewhat a cause célèbre, becoming infamous during the Video Nasty era and traumatising many a teen.

Camille was last seen in **The Butterfly Room**, a glorious, if largely ignored, slice of modern horror which had its roots very much in the classic mould. DC

IN THE DEEP

Sony has apparently secured the script for **In the Deep**, a movie described as **127 Hours** meets **Jaws**. Tony Jaswinski, who is best known for penning TV movies like **Backwoods** and **Xtra Credit** *[oh, THOSE classics! – Ed],* has written the screenplay, with the central plot focusing on a woman in her twenties facing off against a great white shark. Set on a remote beach, the female is casually surfing 60 feet from shore when she realises that there's a shark in the water below her.

At this stage, Lynn Harris and Matti Leshem are attached to produce, with Sony Pictures reportedly keen to get the film moving along sooner rather than later. AP

UNIVERSAL MONSTERS

We've already heard how Universal is planning on restarting their classic monsters realm (see STARBURST #404), and to everyone's surprise the recent **Dracula Untold** laid the first seeds of this new shared universe. Next up is **The Mummy**, to be directed by Alex Kurtzman from a Jon Spaihts script. Now word has it that Noah Hawley will be penning one of the other movies in this monster-filled universe. Hawley is best known for acting as an executive producer on the **Fargo** TV series.

As **Dracula Untold** and **The Mummy** are the only confirmed films at this stage, the big question is which of the monsters Hawley will be working on? Could Hawley be penning an outing for Van Helsing, Frankenstein's monster, The Wolfman, The Invisible Man or even the Creature from the Black Lagoon? We'll have to wait and see.

Expect more on this particular feature as it develops. In the meantime, those whose interests were piqued by Luke Evans' vampiric Count will have to be patient as Kurtzman's **The Mummy** is currently scheduled for a June 24th, 2016 release. AP

STARLIGHT

In terms of having their fingers in a plethora of pies, it doesn't get much more impressive than Mark Millar and his crammed schedule. Whilst the next movie adaptation of a MillarWorld property that we'll see on the big screen is **Kingsman: The Secret Service**, it was reported late last year that 20th Century Fox had picked up the right to Millar and Goran Parlov's **Starlight**. Now a writer has boarded that particular project.

It's been confirmed that Gary Whitta, currently working on the draft for the first of the **Star Wars** spin-off movies, will be penning the script for the adaptation. Whitta's previous credits included the likes of **The Book Of Eli** and Telltale Games' fantastic **The Walking Dead**. Impressively, **Starlight**'s cinematic rights were picked up before the first issue was even released.

The plot is officially described as follows:

"So much for retirement! Meet Duke McQueen, a man who has long since settled down and left his days of saving the Universe and operating as the space hero everyone depended on – at least that's what he thought. His wife long passed, and his kids off embarking on their own adventures; Duke lives a quiet, solitary life until he receives an unexpected call from a distant world, calling him to action one last time."

Simon Kinberg will serve as a producer on the movie, although no release date has been given at this point. AP

GODZILLA 2

With a **Godzilla** sequel already confirmed as happening, it's been reported that Max Borenstein will be returning to pen the screenplay. Borenstein worked on Gareth Edwards' first Godzilla movie and has more recently landed the writing job for the Tom Hiddleston-starring **Skull Island**.

In terms of plot, the sequel to this year's Big G outing has been teased to include appearances from the likes of Rodan, King Ghidorah, and Mothra. Edwards will return to direct the film, although he's initially tied up with the first of the Star Wars spin-off movies.

The sequel to this year's **Godzilla** has already been confirmed for a June 8th, 2018 release. AP

GERRY ANDERSON'S FIRESTORM

Anderson Entertainment, run by the estate of the late, great Gerry Anderson, took to Kickstarter to fund their next project. Entitled **Gerry Anderson's Firestorm**, it's to be filmed in *ULTRAMARIONATION - using brand new puppets, beautifully detailed miniatures, and practical effects. Several big names from previous Gerry Anderson productions will be returning to lend their expertise to the visual effects, voice artistry, and direction of* **Firestorm**, including Shane Rimmer (Scott Tracy) and Matt Zimmerman (Alan Tracy).

The initial target of the Kickstarter project to raise £49,000 was met in less than a week, and the aim is to produce a 5-8 minute 'minisode' to help show off the series to potential investors and distributors, with the intention of a full-blown TV series being made.

The documentary **Filmed In Supermarionation** was reviewed last month, and you can turn to page 60 of this issue to find out more about this and much more Anderson goodness.

DC

Now whereas most of the Marvel news this month centres on the big screen, the majority of the DC news relates to the television world. The only real rumblings of anything newsworthy for the DCCU seem to involve Aquaman and a potential Suicide Squad movie. Aquaman-wise, reports claim that we have already felt the presence of the King of Atlantis in the cinematic world that DC and Warner Bros are putting together. Remember in **Man of Steel** when Henry Cavill's Clark Kent awakens in the ocean after saving some oil rig workers? Remember the whales seen above CK? In case you don't see where this is going, it's believed that the whales were actually sent by Aquaman to protect the Big Blue Boy Scout. As for the Suicide Squad, Warners are looking to push ahead with a film, titled **Task Force X**, focusing on the rag-tag bunch of rogues. So certain that **Task Force X** is to happen, **End of Watch**'s David Ayer is being eyed to direct the movie. Able to pull from the likes of Deathstroke, Harley Quinn, Deadshot, Captain Boomerang, Bane, Poison Ivy, and Killer Frost, it's unclear as to just which bad eggs will be a part of this cinematic Suicide Squad at this stage. On that front, maybe something will be teased when Zack Snyder's **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** is released on 25th March, 2016.

In terms of the small screen news, the shared universe adventures of **Arrow** and **The Flash** are due to return and debut, respectively, this month. **Arrow** has announced that long-time Flash villain George 'Digger' Harkness, aka Captain Boomerang, will appear in the seventh episode of the show's upcoming Season 3. **Spartacus**' Nick Tarabay will be playing the character, who we'd also expect to tangle with The Flash over in Central City at some point. Also appearing in Central City will be Dr. Tina McGee. The character actually appeared back in the '90s **The Flash** show, played by Amanda Pays. In a nice nod to that previous show, Pays will be returning to play the character once more, joining her former Flash John Wesley Shipp in appearing in both that '90s show and this upcoming one. This version of Dr. McGee will work for a rival firm of S.T.A.R. Labs and will take a large interest in Barry Allen's special powers. Additionally, this month saw Mark Pedowitz, President of The CW, tease that the shared universe of **Arrow** and **The Flash** will be used as a testing facility for other characters who could have their own spin-off show at some point. The Huntress, Canary, and Atom are just some characters suggested for their own shows, although there's nothing concrete on that at this stage. Still, Stephen Amell has also mentioned how he sees a Justice League being created for this shared world, with the man under the Arrow's hood name checking Arrow, Arsenal, Flash, Firestorm, and Atom as potential players in a small screen JL. The actor has also talked about how he's hopeful that the show's references to Ferris Air will eventually lead to Green Lantern appearing at some point. Whilst the shows will have aired in the US by the time this is being read by you, faithful readers, **The Flash** debuts in the UK on Sky 1 on October 28th with **Arrow**'s Season 3 landing on the channel on October 30th.

With **The Flash**, **Gotham**, and **Constantine** all shows that are set to debut imminently, another project that appears to be on the way is **Supergirl**. A show that has been shopped around recently, it has finally been given a series commitment from CBS. Greg Berlanti, best known for his work on **Arrow** and **The Flash**, will be developing the show with **Chuck**'s Ali

Not long now until the final film is upon us, and we have a suitably uninspiring poster for the IMAX and HFR release. 'The Defining Chapter' they say. Does anyone *actually* care anymore? Find out if stretching the story out to three movies was worth the effort on December 12th.

Adler. Plot-wise, it's believed that the series will focus on Kara Zor-El, the cousin of a certain Man of Steel, as she starts to use her superpowers on Earth. As the Kara character has been referenced in the DCCU already, could this finally be the time that a DC small screen character and world will tie to the greater cinematic world? As well as **Supergirl**, DC's Vertigo property, **Lucifer**, has also been given the nod for a pilot over at FOX. **Californication**'s Tom Kapinos will be handling the pilot, with it believed to draw inspiration from Mark Carey's time on the **Lucifer** property. From the **Sandman** world, **Lucifer** focuses on the titular character as a sympathetic one, doomed to rule in hell. Tired of his duties, he returned to Earth and modelled himself on David Bowie.

If you still have an urge for ever more DC characters on your television, another project that being developed by Warners is a live-action Teen Titans show. Titled simply **Titans**, **A Beautiful Mind**'s Akiva Goldsman will be scripting the show with Marc Haimes. As to which characters will appear as part of the team, it's already been confirmed that Dick Grayson will be the focal point of the series as Nightwing. Starfire and Raven are two other names who have been confirmed to be a part of the team. So finally, it appears that fans will get to see Nightwing get his moment in the spotlight, even if it will just be in the TV world for now.

Lastly, FOX's **Gotham** has added another famous Batman name to its rank as Harvey Dent will feature in the show alongside versions of the Penguin, Riddler, Catwoman, Poison Ivy, and The Joker. **Final Destination 5**'s Nicholas D'Agosto will play the future Two-Face, although it won't be a recurring role at this stage. The role is expected to be expanded should the show prove to be a success. **Gotham** has already had its UK debut, with a solid if mixed reaction from fans and critics alike. It's not been confirmed at this stage as to which episode Harvey Dent will debut in, but **Gotham** seems to have enough characters to manage without Harv's presence right now. AP

STAR TREK 3

William Shatner has now confirmed that he has been approached to return as James T. Kirk in the third instalment of the relaunched **Star Trek** franchise.

Speaking at the Wizard World Nashville Comic Con, Shatner revealed that J.J. Abrams actually approached him for a role in **Star Trek 3**. Shatner claimed that Abrams said, *"I'm calling, Bill, because the director of the* **Star Trek** *movie, the next one, has had an idea where you might be involved in it. So I am calling to see if you'd be interested."* Abrams, of course, directed the first two installments of this new series of movies.

On whether he'll take the gig, Shatner added, *"Oh, yeah. If it's meaningful. They might want Leonard and myself. How do you get me, fifty years later, into the movie? I know it's science fiction, but even I couldn't come up with an idea."*

Whether Shatner and Nimoy do indeed make an appearance in **Star Trek 3**, we'll have to wait and see. At present, it's believed that the film is targeting a 2016 release to coincide with the franchise's 50th anniversary. AP

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY: THE GHOST DIMENSION

In terms of diminishing quality, it can be argued that you'd be hard pushed to find a better example than Paramount's **Paranormal Activity** franchise. After making quite the impression with its initial entry back in 2007, the series suffered greatly in trying to match that first effort. Whilst each of the further instalments had their merits, the last couple of films have been particularly disappointing. As a result of **Paranormal Activity 4**'s poor return, a fifth movie was put on hold, although they are attempting to have another crack at the box office with **Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension**. This next entry in the series will be released on March 13th, 2015.

Before PA4's poor performance, the fifth film was initially planned for release on October 24th, 2014 but that was scrapped. What was even more disappointing for Paramount was their Latino-based spin-off **Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones**, which fared even worse than PA4 when released in January this year.

This family-friendly action fantasy might have a decent cast including Jeff Daniels and Julianne Moore but you'd think they'd have the Photoshop skills to put out a better poster. Hopefully one will appear before the film hits the multiplexes on February 6th 2015.

In terms of plot, it's said that **The Ghost Dimension** will focus on an entirely new family, although the story will again revolve around two young daughters. AP

MARVEL

On the cinematic front, this month has seen a lot of questions asked about the future of Jeremy Renner's Clint Barton, aka Hawkeye. With many believing that the character may be killed off in the upcoming **Avengers: Age of Ultron**, it appears that there are at least a few more outings planned for the master bowman for the time being. Renner has talked openly about how his Marvel Studios deal has him signed on for three Avengers movies and a solo film, although he stressed how he doesn't believe that he'll get his own film at any point. The actor instead talked up how he believes that the current plan may see a team-up movie featuring Hawkeye and Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow. Renner has also teased on numerous occasions how Hawkeye is likely to have a meaty part to play in the Russo brothers' **Captain America 3**, similar to the presence that Black Widow had in this year's **Captain America: The Winter Soldier**. So, for now at least, those 'Hawkeye to bite the bullet' rumours can be put to bed.

Whilst Hawkeye will next be seen in Joss Whedon's **Avengers: Age of Ultron**, that film will also see the debut of The Vision. This month saw confirmation of what many fans presumed: that Tony Stark's J.A.R.V.I.S. system will essentially evolve into the walking, talking Vision in the follow-up to

Avengers Assemble. Paul Bettany has been long-confirmed to be playing The Vision, and the fact that he has provided his dulcet tones for J.A.R.V.I.S. in several movies now made it apparent that Stark's tech was to get a major upgrade. And as for Stark, this month has seen Robert Downey Jr. confirm that there are no plans in Marvel's cinematic slate, which currently reaches up to 2020, for **Iron Man 4**. Then again, the actor did then go on to say that such a popular character should be milked for all he's worth in terms of movies and appearances, so make of that what you will. At this stage, though, Downey Jr. is only signed on for **Avengers: Age of Ultron** and **The Avengers 3**. You'll be able to see Hawkeye, Vision, Iron Man and the rest of the Avengers gang when **Age of Ultron** hits UK screens on April 24th.

Whereas the roster for Earth's Mightiest Heroes is being expanded in **Age of Ultron**, the MCU is to be taken to the outer reaches of the cosmic and mystic with Scott Derrickson's **Doctor Strange**. On that front, those considered for the role of the Sorcerer Supreme apparently includes Johnny Depp, Jared Leto, Jack Huston, and Tom Hardy. Despite those names all being rumoured for the gig, the clear frontrunner was said to be Joaquin Phoenix. Well for those hoping to see the **Her** star as the Master of the Mystic Arts, it looks like that ship has sailed. Given the requirement of a multi-picture deal and the excessive green screen work involved, talks between Phoenix and Marvel Studios have completely soured at this point, with neither the long deal nor heavy post-production aspect appealing to the actor. Instead, the current rumour (as of going to print, at least) is that Ethan Hawke is a name who is now being bandied about for the Doctor Strange gig. Hawke, of course, worked with director Derrickson on 2012's **Sinister**. At present, it's believed that **Doctor Strange** is pencilled in to nab the July 8th, 2016 release date that Marvel and Disney have already got lined up for one of their upcoming features. With that said, we'd expect to hear some concrete casting news on the film over the next month or two.

We know that Hulk will be a big part of **Avengers: Age of Ultron** (and **Guardians of the Galaxy 2**, if you believe the rumours), but word came out this month from former Hulk (and the man responsible for the nightmares of many a child) Lou Ferrigno to say that he understands that a solo movie and a TV series are on the way for the Green Goliath. If Ferrigno is to be believed, a film will come first, possibly going into production within the next year, then a CGI-heavy TV series will follow. Just as to how privy the man who greened-up in the iconic **The Incredible Hulk** TV show of the '70s would be to information and plans on the future of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and beyond is up for debate, so treat this as purely speculation for the time being.

While Disney's Marvel realm is proving to be a huge success, 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties have suffered a mixed bag over the last decade or more in terms of fan and critical response. This month saw official confirmation of the news that we all knew: Bryan Singer will be returning to direct **X-Men: Apocalypse**, a film that will be released on May 27th, 2016. Similarly, James McAvoy, who plays the younger Charles Xavier in the franchise, has talked openly about how he will finally be shaving his head to portray a bald Professor X in **Apocalypse**. But away from hairdos and stuff we already knew, in even bigger and better news, fans' cries have finally been answered and Fox have confirmed **Deadpool** for a February 12th, 2016 release. Yes, after the hugely positive response to that leaked Ryan Reynolds/CGI test footage earlier this year, the powers that be have taken note and confirmed that Reynolds will return as the Merc with a Mouth for a solo adventure. Reynolds' Wade Wilson was one of few plus points of Gavin Hood's **X-Men Origins: Wolverine**... well, until the character got completely bastardised and had his mouth sewn up for the film's climactic battle. Now the news of **Deadpool** sent a wave of excitement around the STARBURST office. Sadly, only a day or two later came suggestions that this very adult-themed, violent fan-favourite character may actually see his own film be a PG-13 release. We're hanging on to any shred of hope that this proves not to be the case, though, and **Deadpool** ends up as a very much R-rated movie.

If that wasn't enough cinematic Marvel goodness, there's also Sony's **Amazing Spider-Man** franchise, which saw this year's **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** poorly received by so many. Star Andrew Garfield has put the blame firmly at the door of the studio, saying that the initial script was far different to the end product that we were given. Of course, as a result of that film's failings, **The Amazing Spider-Man 3** has been delayed, with Sony Pictures instead now pursuing spin-offs **The Sinister Six** and **Venom** as priorities. Writer/director Alex Kurtzman has suggested that we'll get a very dark Venom, which will see the symbiote-centric villain/antihero able to cross various lines that Spider-Man cannot. No exact release date is known for either of these spin-off features, but they're both expected before **The Amazing Spider-Man 3** hits in 2018.

And finally, if we turn our attention to Marvel's small-screen adventures, this month has brought confirmation that Dominic Cooper will indeed reprise his Howard Stark role for the upcoming **Agent Carter** series. Cooper played the character in both **Captain America: The First Avenger** and the **Agent Carter** One-Shot. And what would a minted inventor-type be without a butler? That's right, **Cloud Atlas**' James D'Arcy has been cast as Edwin Jarvis in the show. Jarvis, of course, would go on to make such an impression on a young Tony Stark that he would name his genius tech system (as referenced earlier in this news piece) after him. And on the topic of mentors, Marvel's Netflix-exclusive **Daredevil** has added **The Silence of the Lambs**' Scott Glenn as Stick, the blind master who taught Matt Murdock how to hone his senses and develop his own radar of sorts. Both **Daredevil** and **Agent Carter** will be debuting early next year. AP

AND FINALLY...

Just when we thought we'd seen the back of the **Twilight** saga, it seems author Stephanie Meyer plans to bring a series of short films to Facebook next year. Five different directors will be selected to helm the shorts as part of a project entitled **The Storytellers – New Creative Voices of the Twilight Saga**. We really do despair...

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Apparently the **Zombieland** sequel is going ahead. Despite the TV show pilot failing to be picked up, Sony Pictures have hired the original's director Ruben Fleischer to do the honours once again. **The Expendables'** screenwriter Dave Callaham is also on board.

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Tommy Wirkola will not be returning to direct **Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters 2**, but has completed the script. As well as having directed the original, which starred Jeremy Renner and Gemma Arterton as the reimagined siblings, he was behind the surprise hit **Dead Snow**, and its follow-up, and apparently doesn't want to be behind the lens on another sequel. He hopes to stay on the project in a producer capacity, however.

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Arrested Development star Jeffrey Tambor has revealed during a USTV interview there's talk of making **Hellboy 3**, adding, *"But they better hurry or I'm going to be in a walker."*

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As well as having a ridiculous spellcheck-baiting title, **Terminator Genisys** will be 'a love story', according to one of the stars, J.K. Simmons. Rather than a formulaic effects-led film, he says, *"I found the script to be really much more intelligent and fun and funny and well-rounded and heartfelt"* We just want a time-travelling cyborg shooting shit up...

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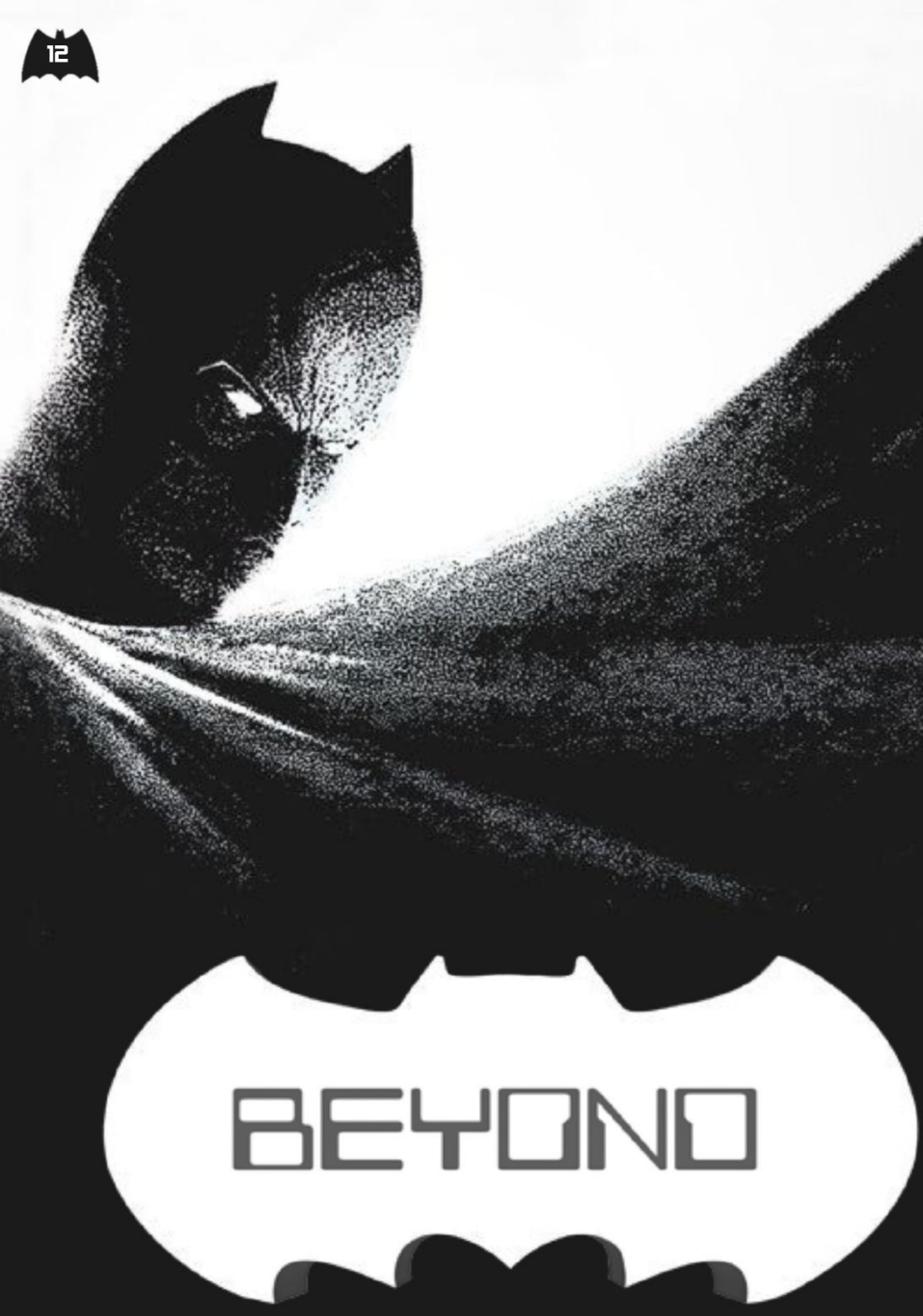
Following the commercial success of **The Purge: Anarchy, The Purge 3** has been given the greenlight and likely to begin filming before the year's end. James DeMonaco will once again write and direct.

TTC 406 stories by MARTIN UNSWORTH, ANDREW POLLARD, DOMINIC CUTHBERT and KIERON MOORE. Edited by MARTIN UNSWORTH.



BEYOND

by Andrew Pollard

With the mass hysteria of BATFLECK finally starting to settle down, now is the perfect time to take stock as to what THE DARK KNIGHT has on his plate over the upcoming few years. Just as THE CAPED CRUSADER is turning 75, it can be argued that he's now more popular in certain quarters than he's ever been. With no sign of slowing down any time soon, we look at what's on the horizon for the WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE across various platforms.

NEXT UP TO BAT

A New Dawn

Lewis G. Wilson, Robert Lowery, Adam West, Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, George Clooney, Christian Bale; all names that have donned the cape and cowl in a live-action format. And pretty soon you'll be able to expand that list and add former Daredevil, former one half of 'Bennifer', former Shannon Hamilton (and his love of uncomfortable places), the man who soared at the top of Hollywood's A-list, plummeted to near career extinction, then embarked on a remarkable road to redemption, Ben Affleck. In case you've been living under a rock for the last few months, Affleck will be playing the Batman in DC's cinematic world that began with Zack Snyder's Man of Steel. After wowing audiences with his directorial efforts, it came a little out of left field to see Affleck cast as The Caped Crusader for Snyder's Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice, and presumably further films beginning with Justice League; also to be directed by Snyder.

If ever there was a day when the Internet threatened to explode, it was the day that Batfleck became a trending topic on Twitter. To say fans were divided would be a massive understatement. In fairness, the news was generally met with an overwhelming sense of bemusement, anger, and shock. Wasn't this the role that Josh Brolin was supposed to get? Wasn't this the role that Ryan Gosling was set to get? Wasn't there a chance that Christian Bale would reprise his role from Christopher Nolan's trilogy of films? Well none of those nabbed The Dark Knight gig as Affleck was confirmed to play a more mature, grizzled Batman than we'd seen before. Frank Miller's iconic The Dark Knight Returns was heralded as an inspiration for this latest cinematic Batman, although just how much this version of the character will pull from Miller's work remains to be seen.

As people bitched, moaned, bitched, and moaned about Affleck's casting, we were firmly championing the news. After all, this wouldn't be the first time that the Batman franchise would cause some casting controversy. To go back to the classic 1960s' Batman show, many were amazed to see Cesar Romero brashly displaying an impressive moustache under his Joker make-up. Then there was the stink caused by Michael Keaton, at that stage best known for playing funny in Mr. Mom and Beetlejuice, when cast to play the titular role in Tim Burton's 1989 Batman. Then, more recently, could Warner Brothers be serious about casting that good-looking Australian fella from A Knight's Tale, then best known for getting all kinds of friendly with Jake Gyllenhaal in Brokeback Mountain, to play the Clown Prince of Crime in The Dark Knight? They most definitely could, resulting in Heath Ledger taking home a posthumous Oscar for his mesmerising performance in that film.

So here we are, hotly anticipating the latest big screen arrival of The Dark Knight. Whilst the specifics of the plot of Batman v Superman are still being kept under wraps, speculation suggests that Bruce Wayne will have had a careful eye on the destruction and carnage (you know, the totally non-Superman-like parts) caused by Henry Cavill's Big Blue Boy Scout in Man of Steel. As this apparent alien menace was tearing up buildings as he battled General Zod, it seems as if the World's Greatest Detective's thoughts on Superman won't initially be positive ones. The strongest rumours point to Batman looking to neutralise this alien threat of Kal-El, then the World's Finest combining to tackle a larger, sinister threat, possibly involving Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor. Of course, as we know by now, Bats and Supes will be joined in the film by Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman and Jason Momoa's Aquaman (who's still yet to be officially confirmed, he

will be there, though), with an appearance by future Cyborg, not to mention future Justice League member, Victor Stone (Ray Fisher).

Looking further down the line, Zack Snyder will be following up Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice with Justice League, presumably with another large part to play for Affleck's Dark Knight. Then there's the inevitable solo film for the character. With no confirmation on another Batman movie at this stage, rumours suggest that they are looking at 2019 for a film tentatively titled The Batman. Obviously, there's also the chance that the character could appear in other WB/DC films, similar to how Marvel Studios and Disney have their characters regularly cropping up in other heroes' films.

What is hugely intriguing about this latest cinematic incarnation of Batman is that there is no origin story; Batman v Superman will jump in with the Bruce Wayne character when he is way into his Dark Knight tenure. A Batman in his 40s has a lot of history, including several possible Robins, a laundry list of villains, and several tragic arcs that have made him the battered and worn down Caped Crusader that it's expected we'll be seeing in Snyder's Man of Steel follow-up. Again, despite a lack of confirmed synopsis for the film, regular rumours suggest that Dick Grayson exists in this world and that he has a fractured relationship with his former mentor. That then throws up a plethora of questions surrounding characters like Jason Todd, Tim Drake, and Barbara Gordon et al. It'll certainly be interesting to see how Snyder and Warner Brothers approach Batman's backstory this time out, but the footage that was shown at San Diego Comic-Con certainly whet our appetite, and piqued our interest as Warners and DC look to play catch-up to Disney and Marvel. Sadly, though, we'll have to wait until March 25th, 2016 for Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice to finally hit screens. But hell, we're much happier at the prospect of seeing Affleck and Cavill duking it out rather than Colin Farrell and Jude Law, as was the case the last time such a match-up was on the card.

In Darkest Knight

Whilst Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight films proved to be a huge success at the box office, The Caped Crusader has also been making some waves in the video game world over the last few years. In the Arkham series of games, Rocksteady Studios, and latterly Warner Brothers Games Montreal, have created a gaming franchise that is engaging, enthralling and full of rewards for long-time Bat-fans. The series began with 2009's Arkham Asylum; then 2011's Arkham City, followed by 2013's prequel entry, Arkham Origins, and now we have another entry on the horizon. Next year will see the arrival of Arkham Knight, which will pick the action up a year after the events of Arkham City. The Scarecrow, who has appeared several times in the series so far, will be the main villain of the piece, but one new addition that has fans drooling is the ability to drive the Batmobile in next year's release. This next outing, which will again revert to Rocksteady after WB Games Montreal handled Arkham Origins, has sadly been confirmed as being the last game in the series.
Plot-wise, this franchise finale will see the aforementioned Scarecrow pulling the strings of a plan that aims to bring all of The Dark Knight's enemies together in one combined effort to finally kill off The Caped Crusader. Already confirmed to return are the likes of The Penguin, The Riddler, Two-Face, and Harley Quinn, with it seemingly an inevitability that The Joker will somehow appear as well despite his apparent demise at the end of Arkham City. Similarly, Kevin Conroy, who has provided the vocals for Batman in a slew of animated and video game affairs, will be returning to lend his iconic tones to the World's Greatest Detective. As well as the Scarecrow, though, Conroy's Batman will be going up against a completely new villain called Arkham Knight. Devised specifically for the game by Rocksteady and DC's Geoff Johns and Jim Lee, this new villain will essentially be a militarised version of Batman, with an "A" logo, representing Arkham Asylum, emblazoned on his chest.

Arkham Knight will take place in a Gotham City that is purely a place for criminals. The Scarecrow concocts a plan that effectively sees the standard citizens of Gotham evacuate the city, leaving only the criminal element to remain. Impressively, the game claims that it will be five times the size of the open-air Arkham City prison featured in Arkham City. In a world of wrong 'uns, Bats will still have Barbara Gordon's Oracle assisting him in his quest to fight the good fight, plus we'd expect to see some of the familiar Bat-family make appearances throughout the game. As far as a release goes, Batman: Arkham Knight is to be released exclusively on PlayStation 4, Xbox One and on Microsoft Windows platforms, meaning if you've been putting off that next-gen console purchase then this might be just the excuse that you've been waiting for to raid your coffers. Arkham Knight is due out worldwide on June 2nd, 2015.

Street Life

With some heavy cash currently being plunged into the TV market with shows like Game of Thrones, The Walking Dead and Boardwalk Empire, episodic television is a perfect canvas to tell a considered, thorough, engaging story. Superheroes are no stranger to the small screen, and DC Entertainment is certainly looking to get the most out of its roster of characters. Given the success of The CW's Arrow, that spawned a spin-off in the form of The Flash. Also on the way is Constantine, with the likes of Lucifer and Supergirl also in the preliminary stages of being adapted for TV. Of course, the world of Batman is no different. Headed up by The Mentalist's Bruno Heller, FOX have put together Gotham, a show that was initially said

to focus on Jim Gordon's arrival in Gotham City and his attempt to clean up both the streets and the police force. Homeland's Ben McKenzie, who also voiced Batman in the animated Batman: Year One, plays Gordon in the show, teaming up with cult favourite Donal Logue as Harvey Bullock. Now, whilst the initial M.O. was to focus on Gordon, the show has since seemed to experience a shift in its nature.

We've known for a while that the pilot of Gotham would feature the death of Thomas and Martha Wayne, complete with an appearance by a young Bruce Wayne and the family butler, Alfred Pennyworth. The character of Bruce, played by David Mazouz, was at first said to feature throughout the series but in a background role. Then word came that the endgame of the series was to have Bruce don the Batsuit, and that he may play a more predominant role than first imagined. And then there's the addition of younger versions of Catwoman, The Riddler, The Penguin, and Poison Ivy; there's even word that the show plans to introduce a younger version of Batman's greatest nemesis, The Joker. Crammed, no? As far as other familiar DC names and faces, the show also features the likes of Barbara Kean, GCPD's Captain Sarah Essen, Carmine Falcone, and Renee Montoya, with new additions like Jada Pinkett Smith as gang boss Fish Mooney.

Gotham has already begun airing over in the United States, with a UK premiere set for an unconfirmed date in October on Channel 5, and could well be airing by the time you read this. The first episode of the show has a lot of promise, and has some great dialogue at its core. McKenzie's Gordon performance is strong, compelling, and uncompromising, which was always going to be key to any success that this show was going to have. Additionally, Robin Lord Taylor's turn as Oswald Cobblepot is mightily impressive and we're particularly looking forward to seeing his ascension to becoming The Penguin that we all know and love. Pinkett Smith also has a magnetism and menacing charm to her Fish Mooney, especially in her relationship with Logue's Bullock. Whether the show is trying to be too clever and include too many elements remains to be seen, but Gotham is off to a promising start.

The Dark Knight vs. The Boy Wonder

Despite the general public having a huge misconception that the character of Robin working alongside Batman only serves as adding a camp, questionable element to The Caped Crusader, long-time fans of Batman usually have a different opinion. If you ask any diehard Bat-fan who their favourite Robin is, chances are you'll get a vast array of answers.

There's Dick Grayson - the original Robin - one-time leader of the Teen Titans, who would go on to patrol Blüdhaven as fan favourite Nightwing. There's Jason Todd, the angry street kid who was bludgeoned to death by The Joker before returning as the clinical vigilante known as The Red Hood. There's Tim Drake, the teen who worked out that Bruce Wayne was Batman, and who is the most Batman-like of all of the Robins in his methods and his approach. How about Damian Wayne, the son of Bruce Wayne and Talia al Ghul, trained by the League of Assassins and not afraid to shed a bucket-load of blood; and there are even other characters like Carrie Kelley and Stephanie Brown who have donned the famed Robin outfit at various times and in various timelines. So safe to say, Robin has always been an important character in the mythos of The Dark Knight.

It's no exaggeration to say that there was a stage when every single animated Batman movie was a joy to watch. Even with Jay Oliva's more recent adaptation of Frank Miller's The Dark Knight Returns, the quality was remarkably high, making fantastic viewing for fans of the source material and for fans new to the tale. That said, the overall standard of the animated DC movies has dropped massively over the last few years. Yes, Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox was hugely impressive, but the likes of Justice League: War, Justice League: Doom, Superman: Unbound and Green Lantern: Emerald Knights were poor efforts that tarnished the reputation the DC animated features of yesteryear had done so well to establish. Whilst Justice League: Throne of Atlantis is up next, after that is a project by the name of Batman vs. Robin.

Taking place in the recently established New 52 animated world that began back with this year's Justice League: War, the plot of Batman vs. Robin is somewhat shrouded in mystery. The initial rumour was the film would mirror the plot of Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo's Court of Owls comic book arc. That particular story and the following Night of the Owls centred on the Court of Owls organisation and the control that they've held over Gotham City for so many centuries. Recently, it's been said that Batman vs. Robin wouldn't be a direct adaptation of the Court of Owls arc, although the Court of Owls will appear in the film. As for the aspect of Batman going up against Robin, it's expected that the Robin in question will be Damian Wayne, who took centre-stage in this year's Son of Batman. As to what the versus in the title refers to, we're not completely in the know on that just yet, but expect some sort of bickering and conflict between the World's Greatest Detective and the fruit of his loins rather than full-on fighting to the death between the pair. There's no exact release date for the project, but Batman vs. Robin is looking to be released next summer at some point.

Limitless

Whilst there are very sketchy specifics known about the animated Batman vs. Robin feature, there are even less details out there on another Batman project: Batman Unlimited. After a piece of concept art appeared at this year's Las Vegas Licensing Expo, surprised fans presumed that it was to be a new animated series to replace the shelved Beware the Batman. Since then, certain outlets have reported that this latest project will actually be another animated movie. Those particular stories even go as far as suggesting that the film will take the more family-friendly approach used in the recent JLA Adventures: Trapped in Time.

So yeah, Batman Unlimited is happening. That's it. That's all we know. The more recent rumours suggest it will be a straight-up animated movie-type affair, although logic suggests that the animated series option would likely be a better option at this stage. Besides, despite some moments of brilliance in Batman Beyond and Batman: The Brave and the Bold, fans have been crying out for a truly special Batman series since the legendary Batman: The Animated Series finally came to an end. Regardless of what it turns out to be, Batman Unlimited is another project expected to surface at some point next year.

Back to Basics

Back to where it all began - comic books. At present, the more recent storylines across the various Bat-books seem to be feeling the burden of both last year's death of Damian Wayne, and this year's Death of the Family. In terms of current arcs, one of the big ones is Eternal, featuring a plot that has Jim Gordon incarcerated and the first New 52 appearance of fan favourite villain, Hush. Elsewhere, Harper Row has swerved the Robin gig that so many presumed she'd take on, instead becoming Bluebird. The story spreads the action far and wide to include the likes of Carmine Falcone, Vicki Vale, Stephanie Brown, Batwing, Jim Corrigan, Red Robin, Red Hood, Batgirl, as well as bringing back the Zachary Gates character from the Gates of Gotham arc. Eternal, another plot headed up by Scott Snyder, began back in April of this year, and is expected to wrap up in March of next year.

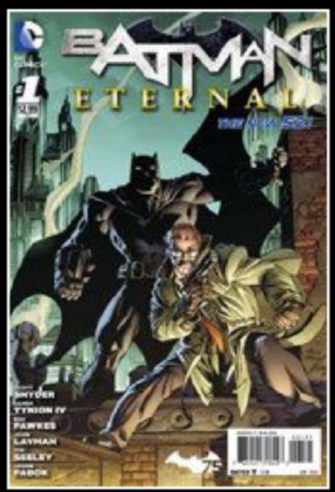
Elsewhere, December of this year will see the big reveal of the Robin Rises arc. After Apokalips stole the perished Damian Wayne's body, Batman went on a mission to retrieve his son's corpse. Not only that, he vowed to bring the boy back... alive! Some of the art that has been released for future issues shows what appears to be Damian back from the grave, although all doesn't seem quite right with the former Robin. Could this really be the Damian Wayne? If so, could he be about to go on a crazed Jason Todd-esque path? Surely, Bruce Wayne would realise by now that the whole 'back from the dead' thing rarely ends well. Either way, a life form that looks like Damian Wayne is seemingly alive and kicking as this story comes to a conclusion at the close of the year.

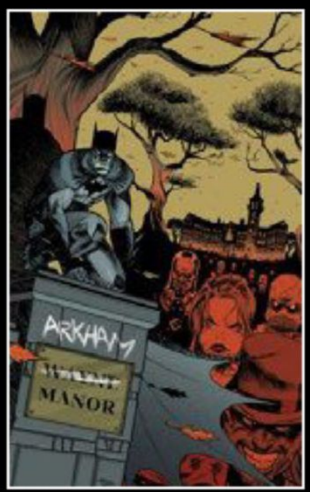
If the potential return of a former Robin wasn't enough sidekick action for you, the Futures End event is to feature a new Robin! After an appearance in Zero Year, Duke Thomas apparently steps up and becomes Robin in a few years from the present day. As Futures End picks up with events several years down the line, we see Duke rocking some shiny, futuristic Robin duds as he's working alongside the older Bruce Wayne. Whilst Terry McGinnies' Batman Beyond is a huge part of the Futures End event way, way in the future, the nearer future shows how Batman has struggled in the aftermath of Damian's death and how he is now seemingly at a point where he once more realises the important of Batman having a Robin alongside him. The thing is, as always with these future events, is this one that we'll ever actually see the DCU arrive at?

As of this very month, another huge event (aren't they all?) is just getting started in the main Batman title. Again, from Snyder and Greg Capullo, Endgame is a story that is being teased as being a major game-changer (again, aren't they all?). Snyder himself has even gone on record to talk about the various bombshells that the arc will deliver from its very beginnings. Given how the Bat-family was severely fractured in the fall-out of Death of the Family, it'll be interesting to see how Snyder and Capullo, who have received widespread praise from fans and critics alike for their run with Batman, handle this latest traumatic event in the life of the World's Greatest Detective.

Furthermore, if that was still not enough comic book Bats for you, this month also sees the release of the new Arkham Manor title, with November bringing Gotham by Midnight. Described as creepy and full of horror elements, Arkham Manor, by Gerry Duggan and Shawn Crystal, sees Arkham Asylum destroyed and effectively relocated to Wayne Manor. As for Gotham by Midnight, that will focus on Jim Corrigan, the Gotham City Police Department and some of the more supernatural occurrences that go on in the city. Both of these titles, timeline-wise, will be set after the events of the Eternal storyline.

There we have it. Enough Batman previewing details to fill the Batcave with. Whether you like your Dark Knight on the big screen, the small screen, in a video game or just in the good old-fashioned comic book format, it's safe to say that this 75 years young Caped Crusader is just as popular now as he's ever been. Over the next few years, The Dark Knight will well and truly return. But then, did he ever really go away?





FROM THE CREATOR OF THUNDERBIRDS
GERRY ANDERSON'S
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FILMED IN ULTRAMARIONATION
NOW FUNDING STRETCH GOALS!
GERRY ANDERSON
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RUFFLING FEATHERS

Words: Nick Spacek

ROBIN LORD TAYLOR first came to the attention of genre fans in ANOTHER EARTH and WOULD YOU RATHER, as well as a notable two-episode stint as Sam in Season Four of THE WALKING DEAD. However, it's his most recent and current role, as Oswald Cobblepot – aka the PENGUIN – on Fox's new show, GOTHAM, that has brought him acclaim. We spoke with Taylor about his role as Cobblepot...

STARBURST: You've done a lot of genre work, and it's kind of interesting to see how that's progressed to this bigger role.
Robin Lord Taylor: Yeah, definitely! I would say a lot of it has to do with the fact that I'm a character actor, and genre work – especially for someone of my type – is just a lot of the roles I've fallen into. So, I have no strategy at all, in terms of getting roles. I'm a working actor, and up until recently, it's just been whatever I auditioned for; trying to get work. Trying to maintain my health insurance has been my primary goal! But, I've been lucky in the sense that I've been working, you know, but it is interesting to see that I've been playing a lot of darker characters in some dark, twisted things, like *Would You Rather* and *The Walking Dead*, and just the other sci-fi stuff like *Another Earth*. It's interesting when you step back, and look at the patterns that have happened, and knowing that there was no strategy at all, except just not having to get a day job or whatever.

It seems like your character, Julian, in *Would You Rather*, is almost a proto-Cobblepot: this quiet, yet extremely scary character.
There are definitely similarities there. The difference, I would say, is that the character in *Would You Rather* comes from a lot of privilege. His ambition isn't as great, because he hasn't had to work as hard to establish himself as Cobblepot does. But, you're right. There are definitely similarities there, in terms of their darkness and their severe lack of empathy in terms of life and whatnot.

It's interesting, in that Cobblepot's introduction shows both sides of him in the same scene. There's the public, almost deferential side, and the impulsive, violent side. How do you play that sort of swing within one scene?
The thing that I think about the character that is really remarkable is his intense ambition, and the fact that [because of] where he comes from, and his previous experiences, the way he looks, and the way he's been treated his whole life, he has this intense desire not to be a powerless person and to not be walked upon – to actually control his own destiny. In Gotham City, and the circles that he finds himself in, it comes down to the line where, in order to become what he wants to become, he won't let anything stand in his way. As opposed to a normal, well-adjusted person, he has no reservations about doing whatever it takes, and often that does lead to violent acts. That's his environment. It's Gotham City, and that's the way it rolls there.

Very violent acts! It's amazing how much blood there is for a primetime show. There's been a lot of blood spray in the first couple of episodes.
It's a dark show, but as I said, it is the world we are trying to create. It's a world where these things do happen and these people do make these terrible, terrible

choices. Personally, I don't think it's gratuitous, because it all ties into the story, and because he is Oswald Cobblepot, who becomes the Penguin. He ends up becoming a supervillain in the Batman universe and, to get to that point, there's going to be some carnage.

You've mentioned a couple of times about Cobblepot's backstory and future plans. Showrunner Bruno Heller said that the whole season is mapped out, start-to-finish. Do you know what's going to happen?
I really don't! For example, we're shooting the ninth episode, and just a couple days ago, I got the script for the tenth episode, and that's as far as I know. And I know less than the hair department, you know what I mean? They know the outlines way into the future, but I think it's intentional they don't tell us. And personally I prefer it, because it's more authentic. I feel like I'm going along the ride with the character.

I mean, I could probably sit down with Bruno and beg him to tell me what's going to happen, throwing myself at his feet, but at the same time, I don't want to, because I think it helps maintain some authenticity, like I said. I don't feel like discovering things along the way would be as organic as when I come in just not knowing.

Of course, because if you know the outcome at the end of this season or beyond, you run the risk of telegraphing something.
Much in the same way that I try to avoid reading things. I mean, I read the responses on Twitter, and certain articles that come out – reviews – but I try and avoid that, because having that noise in your head when you're on set, trying to create something, it's malaise, you know? And it takes you out of the moment. I like the purity of just creating in the moment of when we're doing it, and I think it helps me not to have that in my brain.

In line with that, have you avoided looking at the various Penguin performances that have come before?
I grew up watching the Adam West series that was on TV after school, so that was there, and I was basically raised on the Tim Burton *Batman* films. *Batman Returns* was basically on 24/7 on HBO when I was a kid, so I'd seen that a million times. I actually did go back and rewatch that film, and it was such a different take on what we're trying to do that it actually didn't make me nervous that I would be affected by that or hindered in any way.

But I enjoyed it, because there are things about both Burgess Meredith's Penguin and Danny DeVito's Penguin that I found useful. The fun, the enjoyment, the glee, and the wit that they bring to the character are something that I want to remember when I'm on set. Because we are creating such a dark world, I want there to be a little bit of that – I don't want to say 'camp' because that's *too* far in that direction, but I want there to be that fun there, as well. As fun as it can be, and still be true to the world.

In line with the fact that every Batman universe has created their own vision of Gotham and the characters within it, you're a very different Penguin than the corpulent one we've come to expect.
I don't know any specifics, but I would think that it's the origin story. I feel like it's just another example of establishing something, and then seeing how far he gets to go as a character. We're just at the beginning – depending on how you look at it – of his descent or rise. We are establishing little things, like in the pilot, how he kills the fisherman for the sandwich. This element of food just keeps coming back into his life as we go through the series, and it will be interesting to see how they build on that.

By the time the pilot aired, how many episodes had you shot?
I think we had shot seven episodes at that point. As the air date was coming closer and closer, it was just sort of strange, because we were living in this sort of bubble. I mean, there was all this buzz; we went to San Diego Comic-Con, and it was screened there, so it was out there to a certain extent, but it was still the anticipation of the release and finally having people see this thing, I think everyone had a big load removed from their shoulders when it finally came out. It was like, "*Ah! People can finally see it, and we can see what they have to say about it.*" It didn't exist in this vacuum anymore, which was totally exciting and completely validating.

Has the response changed how you approach the character at all?
Not really. I've just been approaching Cobblepot in the same way I started out. I don't want the character to be a two-dimensional Snidely Whiplash, twirling his moustache and plotting his next move in every scene. I want him to be an actual person, and a lot of the response has been, "*Is it weird that I'm sympathising with this terrifying person?*" I think that's great. I want there be a strange sense of sympathy there. I'm gratified that people are hooking onto that and I'm working on illuminating the human parts of him, so that it's an actual person going through something.

GOTHAM currently airs in the UK on CHANNEL 5 and is available later on NETFLIX.

SAME BAT TIME, SAME BAT CHANNEL

BATMAN

Written by Paul Mount

KA-POW! As one of the last great unreleased classic TV shows finally arrives on DVD/Blu-ray after years of languishing in 'rights issues' hell, STARBURST takes a look at the worldwide sensation which was the BATMAN live action TV series. BIFF! Dig out your shark repellent Bat-spray, set your atomic batteries to power and, if you wish, your turbines to speed. THWACK! It's time to take a trip to Gotham City, 1960s style... SOCK!!!!

ABC's *Batman* TV series exploded - almost literally - onto US TV screens on January 12th 1966. Its combination of lively, witty, vibrantly-colourful comic strip adventure, the cream of Hollywood's greats guest-starring as a succession of larger-than-life supervillains and irresistibly-ludicrous storylines made it an instant hit with audiences of all ages and it quickly became a genuine international television and cultural phenomenon. But like many a phenomenon, the show burnt brightly and horribly briefly. By March 1968, the Batmania craze which sprang up in the wake of the show's fire-flash success had faded - the TV audience had moved on to other spies, spoofs and superguys - and Batman and Robin hung up their capes and cowls, and the Batcave was closed for business.

Batman was created in 1939 by writers Bob Kane and Bill Finger almost as a direct result of the huge success of Joe Siegel and Jerry Shuster's Superman, who had made his debut in the now-legendary first issue of Action Comics in June 1938. National Publications (later to become better known as DC Comics) wanted more of the same, so Kane and Finger came up with the concept of the caped and cowled crime fighter who patrolled the mean streets of some nameless American city (finally identified as Gotham in 'Batman' issue 4 in 1940) fighting an assortment of cheap hoodlums and gangsters. Batman first appeared in issue 27 of Detective Comics (May 1939) and immediately fired the imagination of the comic book audience. Early stories were distinctly pulpy and Batman (often referred to, then as now, as 'The' Batman) was depicted as a brutal, ruthless vigilante not averse to breaking the necks of his enemies, but by May 1940 the character was starting to become more recognisably the Caped Crusader fans would become familiar with for decades to come when the strip introduced his teen sidekick, Robin the Boy Wonder. Batman's popularity continued to grow and he made his first screen appearance in 1943 in the fifteen-episode serialised film adventure *Batman* starring Lewis Wilson which was followed in 1949 by Robert Lowery donning cape and cowl for *Batman and Robin*. The serials themselves were massively popular and in many ways sealed Batman's reputation as a twentieth century pop culture icon.

But times were to change and by 1964, Batman's stock had slumped alarmingly. The intervention of the infamous Comics Code Authority, created in 1954 following growing concern about the content of comic books largely read by children, had made US comics toothless and childish and the public had started to fall out of love with Batman whose antics had become increasingly juvenile and unsophisticated. DC Comics toyed with idea of cancelling their Batman titles (he had graduated to his own title in 1940, running alongside his regular appearances in Detective Comics). In an attempt to reposition the character, the more fanciful and frivolous elements of the previous few years were dropped and the focus turned to re-establishing Batman's credentials as a detective. But something much more drastic and far-reaching was required to really catapult Batman and Robin and their colourful Rogue's Gallery of adversaries into the public's affections...

Batman as a TV series had been mooted as far back as the early '60s, but original plans envisaged a Saturday morning live action show aimed squarely at children, with former American football star and future *Tarzan* Mike Henry lined up to take the lead role. The series never materialised and the property slowly made its way to the attentions of the ABC network which was struggling in the ratings and unable to match the success of rivals CBS and NBC with their raft of family-friendly shows such as *Lost in Space, I Dream of Jeannie* and *The Munsters*. ABC passed the rights to the series on to 20th Century Fox to produce the show for the Network and producer William Dozier was tasked with turning the four-colour world of Batman into a live action TV series which could, ABC hoped, give them a decent foothold at last in

the TV ratings. Dozier researched the character from the comic books and wasn't impressed with what he saw until he hit on the notion of "over-doing" the character to make it appeal to adults and children alike, but in entirely different ways. Lorenzo Semple Jr. set to work creating the first scripts which would set the tone for the planned series and the search began to find actors prepared to potentially sacrifice both their dignity and career prospects by donning the tights and capes of two of the comic world's most famous sons.

Lyle Waggoner (later to achieve a form of TV notoriety when cast as Colonel Steve Trevor in the '70s *Wonder Woman* series starring Lynda Carter) initially auditioned for the role of Batman, but eventually Adam West was cast after Dozier saw his arch, tongue-in-cheek performance in a TV commercial for Nestle Quik. Hundreds of actors auditioned for the supporting role of Robin but ultimately nineteen-year-old Bert John Gervis Jr. won the role in direct competition with actor Peter Deyell. He quickly adopted his mother's surname Ward (to replace the awkward and potentially difficult-to-pronounce Gervis) and 'punched-up' his Christian name to Burt. The deal was done; Adam West and Burt Ward were Batman/Bruce Wayne and Robin/Dick Grayson – and ABC, with some misgivings about the show's escalating costs as it moved towards production, prepared to launch their newest adventure series on a very unsuspecting public.

Plans to introduce the series with a high profile feature film were abandoned when the movie's proposed scriptwriter Eric Ambler felt unable to work in what he felt was the project's proposed 'camp' storytelling style. The first episodes of the TV series – 'Hi Diddle Riddle' and 'Smack in the Middle' – aired just two months after they'd been filmed and they established the show's tone and format with their dry and sophisticated humour, pop art aesthetic and often deadpan performances, none more notably than from Adam West himself who delivered his Bat-dialogue with a commendably straight face. Burt Ward was a hit with audiences too with his time-of-crisis exclamations of "*Holy...*" which became catchphrases in themselves. Across the show's run Robin uttered nearly 400 exclamations - with "*Holy astringent plum-like fruit!*", "*Holy Robert Louis Stephenson!*", "*Holy here we go again!*" and, appropriately, "*Holy cliffhanger!*", being amongst the most memorable or extraordinary.

The core cast of the show also included veteran actors Alan Napier and Neil Hamilton as Bruce Wayne's faithful butler Alfred and Gotham City's stony-faced Police Commissioner Gordon respectively, with Stafford Repp supporting as the excitable Chief O'Hara and Madge Blake as Dick's fussy Aunt

Harriet. Batman and Robin's colourful enemies were played by some of Hollywoods' finest; each of them happy to join in the fun and wear extravagant costumes and make-up in their tussles with The Caped Crusader and his Boy Wonder. During the first season alone Batman was bedevilled by the Joker (Cesar Romero in whiteface make-up, complete with his trademark moustache - which he refused to remove - clearly visible beneath the face-powder), The Penguin (Burgess Meredith), Catwoman (Julie Newmar), The Riddler (Frank Gorshin), Mr Freeze (George Sanders), The Mad Hatter (David Wayne), and The Bookworm (Roddy McDowell).

Originally planned as a series of fifty-minute episodes, the show ultimately aired two thirty-minute episodes per week on consecutive days, with a spectacular cliffhanger to the first episode, depicting Batman and Robin in some fanciful perilous situation, designed to bring the audience back for the next instalment. Neal Hefti's unforgettable theme tune, the comic strip animated title sequence and the inspired use of superimposed sound effect banners (THUD!) over the frequent fight sequences which punctuated the episodes, gave *Batman* a style and energy which was unique in TV history.

Batman was an instant ratings monster. The show quickly became 'the biggest TV phenomenon of the mid-1960s' and West and Ward became huge stars virtually overnight, massive crowds turning out whenever they made one of their frequent public appearances to promote the show, often in full costume. Fans and critics alike admired the show's deft and heady mixture of colourful action for the kids, and sly, knowing humour for the adults. *Batman* quickly became a byword for 'camp', although in his 2002 autobiography 'Back to the Batcave' West noted that he doesn't necessarily agree that the show was actually camp at all. "*It demeaned our efforts by suggesting that what we were working hard to achieve was so easy or corny or bad that anyone could do it. We just made it look that way,*" he wrote. "*Critics and pop culture historians say we defined camp but that was really just convenient shorthand for them.*"

Camp, kitsch or just damned clever, *Batman* was the hit of the season. The planned feature film went into production during the hiatus between Seasons One and Two. The 1966 *Batman* movie was a riotous explosion of colour and imagination, pitting Batman and Robin against their four deadliest enemies – Joker, Penguin, Riddler, and Catwoman (now played by Lee Meriwether due to Julie Newmar's unavailability) with a particular highlight being Batman's memorable encounter with a rubber shark. An increased budget allowed for new Bat-gadgets to join the slick, streamlined, rocket-launching Batmobile of the TV series; the Batcopter and Batboat made their debut (and were never seen again apart from film footage slotted into later TV episodes) alongside a redesigned Batcycle. Curiously, despite the success of the TV series, the film wasn't especially well-received and was only a moderate Box Office hit.

The series powered on into its second season – sixty new episodes as opposed to the thirty-four of the first – but the cracks quickly started to show. What had seemed fresh and new in Season One was now becoming repetitive and the jokes weren't quite as funny anymore. William Dozier busied himself setting up the short-lived and more po-faced *Green Hornet* series, and *Batman* was left to fend for itself. But the stories became less imaginative and, although the old villains cropped up here and there, new specially-created baddies like The Archer (Art Carney) and The Minstrel (Van Johnson) were distinctly underpowered and even Vincent Price as Egghead couldn't lift the show from its second season lethargy.

Behind the scenes, problems were growing too. West and Ward, both notorious party animals, didn't always have the easiest of professional relationships (although they eventually became

firm, life-long friends) and, with ratings slipping in the second season, ABC started to get jittery about the show's gigantic budget. With a large regular cast, outlandish new props required every week and expensive action sequences in virtually every episode, *Batman* was costing ABC a small fortune to produce, notwithstanding the money it was generating from overseas sales (it usually aired in a teatime slot in the UK, the thirty-minute episodes themselves cut into fifteen-minute segments which aired nightly in some ITV regions) and worldwide merchandise.

By the time the third season rolled around, ABC had ordered significant changes. Budgets were to be slashed and the series was retooled into short, sharp, single-episode stories. The infamous cliffhangers - and the breathless, Dozier-voiced *"tune in next week"* voice-overs - were gone, replaced with brief lead-in teasers for the next episode. In an attempt to woo back lost viewers and to draw in new ones, Yvonne Craig was drafted into the series to play Batgirl aka Barbara Gordon, Commissioner Gordon's curvy motorbike straddling crime-fighting daughter. She was a useful addition to the cast and the series briefly seemed to have a renewed spring in its step in its third season. But the budget cuts were painful; much of the action took place on unfinished or undecorated sets – free-standing doors led nowhere, walls were replaced by black drapes – and in one

"HOLY SPINOFF, BATMAN!"

By Dominic Cuthbert

Conceived by George W. Trendle and Fran Striker in 1936, THE GREEN HORNET has had a long, lucrative and media-hopping history. You may be most familiar with the 300-plus comic books he's popped up in, or even the trifling Michel Gondry movie, but Britt Reid's alter-ego was spun into stardom on the back of the loveable '60s Batman series...

Grand-nephew to The Lone Ranger, Britt Reid and his side-kick Kato - a martial arts and automotive exper - played by Van Williams and Bruce Lee respectively, made their first televisual appearance as anti-heroes opposite Adam West and Burt Ward in the *Batman* two-part *A Piece of the Action/ Batman's Satisfaction*. Following the commercial success of the guest appearance, ABC capitalised on *The Green Hornet*, giving Kato and Reid a full 26-episode run.

The show pitched Reid as the playboy editor and owner of Chicago's newspaper, The Sentinel, by day and a vigilante alongside Kato at night, in the Black Beauty - the duo's weaponised Imperial Crown Sedan. Armed with the Hornet Sting and a gas gun, Reid took on the city's underbelly, marauding through the great swathe of organised crime.

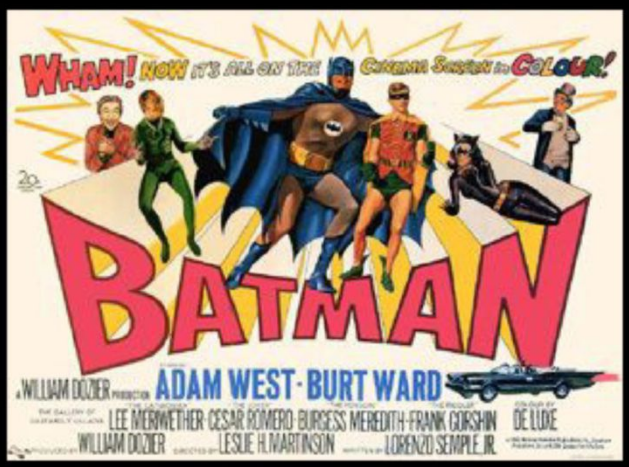
The Green Hornet showcased a masked hero who was wanted by police, and unlike other heroes, Reid used this reputation to his advantage to infiltrate enemy gangs and mobsters. The Dark Knight may well be morally wonky at times, but Reid was actually slumming it.

The series was as much a reaction to *Batman*; often at odds with its counterpart, opting instead for an altogether darker tone and a more realistic approach, despite the *Flight of the Bumblebee* theme tune. One of the key differences was that Reid and Kato were going up against 'normal' bad guys, with no powers or gimmicks, which offered far more social commentary than Adam West in his grey pyjamas.

Despite its strong following, the series was cancelled after only one season in March 1967. Much of the success of the show is due in no small part to Bruce Lee's subsequent fame. Indeed, *The Green Hornet* was retitled *The Kato Show* in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the show remains a cult favourite, with episodes *This Ray is For Killing*, *The Silent Gun* and *Ace in the Hole* proving firm fan favourites.

Such is the appeal of *The Green Hornet* TV series, that writers Kevin Smith and Ralph Garman teamed Reid with Bruce Wayne in the 2014 12-issue series *Batman '66 Meets The Green Hornet*, which follows on from their initial TV pairing.

The Green Hornet is largely ignored by pop culture, but with many similarities to Bruce Wayne and with the longevity of the *Superman* franchise, it's a genuine surprise that Britt Reid isn't as revered as his contemporaries. All that remains is to go out and get *The Green Hornet* box set.



episode an expensive fight sequence was avoided by simply having Batman turn out the lights, the audience just hearing the sounds of combat without actually seeing any of it.

The show's ratings were down, but it was still acquitting itself reasonably well. For a while, *Batman* teetered on the brink of renewal for a fourth season. ABC was keen for Dozier to cut costs for new episodes even further by reusing existing sets and reducing the cast (possibly by getting rid of Batgirl, or else alternating her with Robin to save on fees) but Dozier was reluctant to further compromise the look of the show and he refused to bow to ABC's demands. As a result, just 26 episodes into the third season, the plug was pulled and the series limped off the screen following the uninspiring 'Minerva, Mayhem and Millionaires' episode. NBC quickly stepped in and, for a tantalising moment, it looked as if *Batman* might be saved when they promised to restore the series to the glory of its first season. But the show's expensive and lavish sets – including the fabulous, capacious Batcave – had been destroyed and NBC baulked at the prospect of stumping up nearly one million dollars for them to be rebuilt. Batmania was over; as West put it in his autobiography "*a cultural phenomenon came to an unseemly, unheralded end.*"

With over 100 episodes produced, *Batman* was ripe for the lucrative 'syndication' circuit and the episodes were rerun on local TV stations across the US for decades after the show's cancellation. For West and Ward, the post-*Batman* years were to be frustrating and disillusioning. Hopelessly typecast, both actors found legitimate acting work hard to come by, West in particular being hamstrung by his mannered performance as The Caped Crusader. The pair were reduced to the occasional 'guest-star' slots on episodic television or appearing in forgettable, barely-seen low budget movies. Reluctant for some time to return to the series which had made them, briefly, two of the most recognisable celebrities on the planet, the pair eventually made their peace with the Dynamic Duo and learned to embrace the series' legacy. West frequently voiced Batman in several animated series, and both he and Ward donned their costumes again in a 1978 reunion special *Legend of the Superheroes*, and have since become enthusiastic contributors to various documentary features examining the phenomenon of the TV series. Both men have published their autobiographies, with West's *Back to the Batcave*, a genial and generally good-natured look at his career and the series which made his name and Ward's more salacious kiss-and-tell volume *My Life in Tights* published in 1995.

Few television series - or, indeed, any cultural endeavour - have the ability to perfectly sum up the era and the social mores of the age in which they were created. The *Batman* TV series in many ways encapsulated the brash, inventive, anything-goes, multi-coloured excitement of the Andy Warhol-inspired pop art movement. But more than that - and perhaps of fundamental importance in the development of the huge proliferation of comic book-inspired feature films and TV series we 'enjoy' in the twenty-first century - it established a desire in audiences to see the adventures of comic superheroes brought to life on screen. There may have been bigger, bolder, darker versions of Batman since the TV series faded away in 1968, but none of them have had the impact and enduring appeal of the exploits of Adam West as the Caped Crusader and Burt Ward as his faithful sidekick, Robin the Boy Wonder. The long-awaited arrival of the entire 120-episode series on DVD and Blu-ray, remastered and boasting over three hours of specially-commissioned new features and commentaries, is indeed a cause for celebration for Batfans and afficionados of classic television alike. "*Holy Hallelujah!*" as Robin himself might put it.

BATMAN - THE COMPLETE TV SERIES is released on DVD and Blu-ray on November 10th.

WHERE DOES HE GET THOSE WONDERFUL TOYS?

(THE WORLD OF GREAT, GOOD, BAD AND MAD BATMAN MERCHANDISE)

BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

SINCE HIS INCEPTION 75 YEARS AGO BY CREATOR BOB KANE, BATMAN HAS GONE ON TO BECOME A LEGENDARY IMAGE IN POPULAR CULTURE. MORE PEOPLE WOULD ARGUABLY RECOGNISE THE BAT SYMBOL THAN THEY WOULD MANY OF THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL COMPANY LOGOS. BATMAN HAS SWOOPED INTO CINEMA, TV, RADIO AND, OF COURSE, COMIC BOOKS WITH GRACE, STYLE AND OCCASIONAL DANCING ("YOU SHAKE A PRETTY MEAN CAPE BATMAN") BUT NOTHING CAN COMPARE TO HIS LIFE IN MARKETING. FROM THE CRAZE OF THE '60S SURROUNDING THE TV SERIES TO THE $750 MILLION BATMANIA SURROUNDING THE RELEASE OF TIM BURTON'S ONSCREEN REINVENTION BATMAN (1989), TO THE MODERN DAY FASCINATION WITH BAT GEAR AND A NEWER, MORE REALISTIC IMAGE OF THE BAT, BATMAN MERCHANDISE HAS BEEN VARIED, MAD AND (AS WE SHALL SEE) VAGUELY SEXUAL (SOMETIMES NOT SO VAGUELY EITHER). SO WITH THAT, WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US AS WE RUN ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS OF 'GOT 'EM CITY', TO PURSUE THE BEST, WORST AND ODDEST BATMAN MERCHANDISE OUT THERE...

CREDIT CARD

(NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, 1966)

When George Clooney's Batman whipped out his credit card in Joel Schumacher's Batman & Robin and said, "*never leave the cave without it*" most could only say "*Schu must be joking*", little do they know ol' Bats has sported the plastic since the swinging '60s. Hence this little novelty credit card, replete with the Batman logo and some very serious instructions of use on the back. The most attention grabbing of which read, "*Delinquent accounts result in loss of credit privileges and a big spanking*" (boy they were strict back then). Sadly, you couldn't pay off more than imaginary taxes with this toy as it was not an official payment card, but on the plus side, it makes a nice Brucie bonus for that Bat cosie and should fit nicely into most utility belts.

WATER PISTOL

(ELVIN, 1966)

Sometimes you see an item and just think that The Joker had a hand in the production because clearly someone was pulling (or rather pushing) someone's pisser with this one. This pistol's design is so awkwardly inappropriate that it's hard to imagine any of this was accidental. Not only is the pistol's shape formed by having the caped crusader bending over and spitting at folk (via his freakily painted face) but to 'get him going' you have to push the dodgily placed trigger; and to cap it off, the pistol is refilled via Batman's back passage! Not working for you? Don't worry, there are Popeye, Dumbo, and Donald Duck water pistols done in the same manner in the range.

BAT-BONG
(2K DIFFUSER BEADS, 2012)

'For tobacco use only' warns the site - but even so, it's puzzling to see Batman being used for smoke inhalation and diffusion purposes. This rather intricate bong is decorated with the Batman logo and actually uses his head for the smoking process. Although we must admit there is a great deal of craft in this product, we have yet to see a smoking area in the Bat cave.

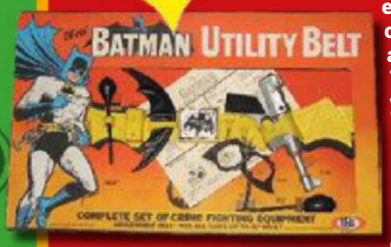
ROGUES GALLERY
(KENNER, 1997)

Anyone can buy a Batman figure, but what about the baddies? Well, this awesome set (styled after a prison block) offered villain-loving kids the chance to own some brilliant little action figures to pit against their Dark Knight. Based on the animated series incarnations, and with numerous little extras (from a cat to a crocodile), the set includes Poison Ivy, Clayface, The Joker, Catwoman, Man-Bat, The Phantasm (from the classic must-see animated feature Batman: Mask of the Phantasm), The Scarecrow and Killer Croc. This set was the stuff of childhood dreams and gave many kids a chance to stage their own Arkham breakout! Let's call it Black-great!

POCKET PUNCHERS
(MILTON BRADLEY, 1995)

These pocket punchers are spin-off merchandise from DC's animated Batman/ Superman series, and you have a choice between Batman vs. Mr. Freeze, Batman vs. The Riddler (a little strange as Riddler isn't particularly handy) or Superman vs. Darkseid. This is essentially a variation on the Rock 'em Sock 'em toy, but a very well made variation - even if they missed a trick not making a Batman vs. Bane model.

UTILITY BELT
(IDEAL, 1966)



Batman's utility belt is arguably the most important part of his costume, with the exception of his cowl and in 1966, at the height of the TV series (and that year's Batman: The Movie), Ideal gave kids the brilliant chance to own their own! A very rare item nowadays, this highly collectable belt had a whole host of attachments for aspiring young crime fighters (and slightly less girthier adults). The kit included: a "real-working" (as opposed to knackered, perhaps) flashlight, a plastic dart gun, some Bat-cuffs, a grapple hook/rope and the trusty Bat-a-rang of course.

VANILLA LIP BALM
(HOT TOPIC, 2013)

Poison Ivy sealed people's fates with a kiss, but this lip balm does the opposite, keeping your kissers in tiptop condition. Just how heavy the demand for Batman lip balm was at all, yet alone with vanilla flavour, is up for debate, but when a lip balm canister is presented with the bright yellow bat symbol and in a tiny cape, it renders said item irresistible.

MEGO-BATMAN
(MEGO, 1973)

There have been many memorable Batman figures: from Ideal's Captain Action Batman to Mattel's Movie Master Dark Knight Batman, but when you are looking at Batman merchandise history, Mego's much loved 1973 Batman doll (or figure as most prefer to call it) must be mentioned. Much like their successful Spider-Man figure, the Mego Batman was to be found in many homes worldwide and, with its attempts to replicate the Adam West look, it simply stood head, shoulders and ears above any other kind of merch on the Bat-market. The early model with a removable cowl is perhaps the quintessential figure, but the later variations cement Mego's Batman in merchandising history.

TEAPOT
(STAFFORDSHIRE FINE CERAMICS, 1989)

When discussing items that tie into Tim Burton's Batman, this independently made item is certainly an unexpected detail. In the grand scheme of things from sex aids to bandages, a Batman teapot is hardly the most surprising piece of Batmania merch but take a look and this Staffordshire Fine Ceramics Toby Jug-esque teapot is certainly not everybody's cup of tea. The perfect blend of funny and grotesque, this teapot is more 'fatman' than Batman, although The Joker-headlined newspaper that forms the spout is an undeniably nice touch. Maybe Alfred could pop one of these in Wayne Manor; then again, maybe it could be used for Bat-a-rang practice.

MARIONETTE
(NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, 1966)

If Batman and The Conjuring's Annabelle ever bumped uglies, this is probably what you would get. This German-made, Punch and Judy style Adam West Batman puppet is truly haunting and the stuff of (Dark) nightmares. The packaging seems to have a rather disturbing artist's impression of Adam West (as Batman) in a fit of crazed laughter and the befuddling headline of "hält die Welt in Atem", which translates as "hold the world in suspense". This is one odd toy to emerge from Europe and would be enough to give Scarface and the Ventriloquist a run for their money, as well as the heebie-jeebies.

VALENTINE'S CARDS
(MECO, 1973)

I'm not sure Mr Freeze would appreciate these occasionally rather cold (pun intended) valentine's cards that seem to romanticise the Penguin, see Batman pursuing a lover in his helicopter, and feature Nora Fries (still in her container) asking her fishbowl-headed hubby to not give her "the cold shoulder". This product was an odd attempt at inserting Batman, and bizarrely some of his greatest foes, into a luvvy-duvvy holiday greeting product. Would a girl really melt at the sight of a card featuring the Batplane being pelted with love hearts?

BOW TIE
(NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, 1965)

This official Batman bow tie, as opposed to all those other unofficial Batman bow tie pretenders out there, is another product that shows fashion sense can glide out of the window when merchandising madness sets in. That said, if the Price is Knight, why not invest in a little Batman bow tie? The best possible way to finish off a 3-piece suit; unless you are Rupert Thorne, that is.

THE TUMBLER
(JAMES EDITION LUXURY GOODS, 2014)

Earlier this year, James Edition Luxury Goods made a few headlines as it had on sale a road legal (in the US anyway- sorry UK fans, it's left hand drive) Batmobile Tumbler from Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy. OK, so maybe it's not merch in the traditional sense- it's a one-off replica, and costs a (Bruce Wayne sized) sum of $1 million - but how could we not include an actual Batmobile on this list? Even if this version didn't have the rockets and detachable Bat-cycle- all dispelled with as part of the "road legal" billing we suppose - it did boast five driver-assist cameras, four 44-inch tyres, a stereo with Bluetooth and iPod integration, and - yes - a CD/DVD player! So whack on a bit of Elfman, Zimmer or... erm... Seal, and go and pick up your shopping in style.

JOKER EYES
(JAMES INDUSTRIES, 1966)

When all else fails, slap a popular brand on an age-old novelty joke/toy. Goofy droopy-eyed glasses have been a staple of most gag shops for about as long as fake arses, if not longer, but clearly marketing saw an eye dropping (or rather rolling) opportunity here and they took it, along with many people's money.

ELASTIC BATMAN
(MEGO, 1979)

While collectable nowadays, Mego were not exactly firing on all cylinders with their Elastic Batman figure, which has to have the strangest look of their range. Despite this, they are highly sought after, as are the Mexican Ensueno Elastico releases of that figure. To boot some figures had an apparent knack of exploding, despite their bendy abilities - talk about going out with a bang.

CONDOMS
(SPENCER & FLEETWOOD, 2013)

Batman always carries protection, from fire-shielded cloaks and Kevlar to Shark Repellent Bat Spray (far more useful than you might think) but this Spencer & Fleetwood novelty condom is taking things a little too far. Although throughout the comics, movies, and TV shows Bruce Wayne has been through a great many girlfriends, which helps hide his dark crime fighting persona (until Alfred lets them into the Bat cave, or they end up being cat burglars or daughters of megalomaniac ageless ninjas), so perhaps this item is another case of a hero sending a strong message. That said, Batman logos on your condoms, a bit egotistical isn't it, as Knox says in Batman, "maybe it should be Bruce v(e)in"?

BOB ACTION FIGURE
(TOY BIZ, 1989)

Show us the child who'd pick Toy Biz's Bob figure over their Joker or Batman and we'll build you a Bat cave free of charge. Bob, for those who don't remember, was basically The Joker's blond-haired goon in Batman (1989) and had little to do but snoop on Vikki Vale and get shot by Jack Nicholson. At no point did he ever crack a smile like Chuck Norris and likewise have a 'power kick' action, as this figure's box art proudly boasts (in fact he actually fled a fight with Batman in the film). Plus, is it just us, or is that figure's hair an epic fail - perhaps Bob used Joker's chemical Shampoo by mistake.

SPACE PROBE
(NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, 1966)

Or small, water-propelled projectile piece of plastic to be more precise. This product is a case of sounding more impressive than it is, sort of like the toy equivalent of The Electrocutioner. Yet it essentially boils down to a Batmanised science project, not exactly a space probe so much as a few metres off the ground (at best) probe.

SUPER-MICRO BAT-RADIO
(NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, 1966)

National Periodical Publications have made all manner of Batman merch, including a Hotline Bat-Phone, but they don't come more cordially packaged than this very classy Super Micro Bat-Radio. Dated by the definition of super-micro, this piece of merchandise still has a great look and its silver colour and fancy box make it very much the decorative nostalgic object for your mantle or trophy room. Pop it next to the family silver!

Now when you are paying homage to one of comics' most popular heroes, a simple zip-up backpack is not really good enough - enter this officially produced DC Comics costume backpack. The body straps turn any black/grey shirt into Batman body armour (with two body straps - one across the chest with a bat emblem on it and the other forming a utility belt around the waist). Best of all, not only can it be filled with all your daily gadgets as you travel through the city, but should you encounter a mugger, a thief or a particularly unruly Chihuahua, then this backpack has a little cowl hood and some novelty wings that you can unleash for that ultimate caped crime fighting commuter effect.

CAPED BACKPACK
(DC COMICS, 2014)

PYJAMAS
(NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, 1966)

Kids really are open to the techniques of mass advertising and merchandising, but even they must want some things about as much as the world wants an Oswald Cobblepot sex tape. Take these "fun" children's pyjamas, which look like they were pulled from the ruins of the Janjira Nuclear Power Plant. Despite the Bat-logo, this is not something you'd force a child to wear.

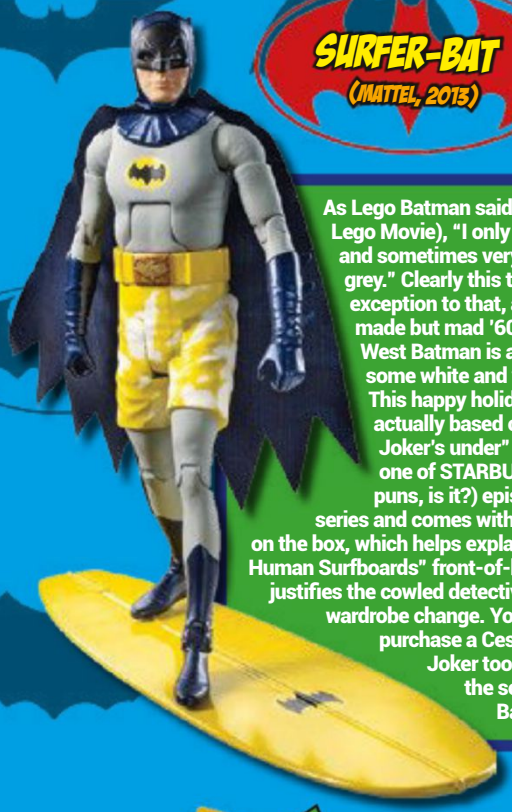
DICK T-SHIRT
(ETSY, 2011)

You have to feel sorry for Robin a bit, his name has always followed Batman's, his outfit is far less impressive, his parents were murdered, he is constantly used as a source of jokes (see the age old Batman 'bitch slap' meme) and his real name is Dick. Still, you have to take what god gives ya' and make the best of it and so comes this humorous T-shirt. Featuring Burt Ward's Robin with closed fists and the word Dick in big white letters, messages don't come simpler than this. Holy self-deprecation, Batman!

This specially-made novelty coffee table uses Michelle Pfeiffer's immortal leather-clad performance as Catwoman in Batman Returns, and props a table up with it. Although in this case, Selina seems to be in a slight state of undress (steady on), missing her boots and sharp-nailed gloves, plus she bizarrely has a lemur-like tail. Yeah, we don't particularly get it either, but it's still better than anything Changing Rooms could have managed... well, probably.

COFFEE TABLE
(REDBEAU MANNEQUIN, 2007)

SURFER-BAT
(MATTEL, 2013)



As Lego Batman said (in The Lego Movie), "I only work in black.... and sometimes very, very dark grey." Clearly this toy takes an exception to that, as this well-made but mad '60s style Adam West Batman is also wearing some white and yellow shorts. This happy holidaying Batman is actually based on the "surf's up, Joker's under" (not a patch on one of STARBURST's cracking puns, is it?) episode of the '60s series and comes with the synopsis on the box, which helps explain the "Holy Human Surfboards" front-of-box quote and justifies the cowled detective's questionable wardrobe change. You can also purchase a Cesar Romero surfer Joker too, just to add to the seaside-themed Batman fun.

MARVEL TEAM-UP
(BONUS, 1997)

What's that face for? Surely you remember Batman in Avengers Assemble and his cameo in The Incredible Hulk. No? Well, maybe you should ring the makers of this bootleg toy series that seems to completely ignore the fact Batman (and Superman, Spider-Man, Hulk, Wolverine, etc. for that matter) is actually based on a comic at all. Laugh all you want at this cheap oversight, but The Justice League and Avengers were this close to going on Jeremy Kyle with the topic of 'our hero is cheating on us with another group'. Imagine how tense the reading of those lie detector results would have been...

THE SENSE OF RIGHT ALLIANCE
(UNTITLED CHINESE MANUFACTURER, 2007)

Batman? Spiderman? The Fantastic Four, Power Rangers, Shrek, Mr Incredible, Lightening McQueen?! All part of a team called The Sense of Right Alliance? OK, the Marvel set was one thing, but now we're just confused, has the Mad Hatter slipped something in our tea again? Plus, what the blue hell does their phrase "let's fence against the earth" mean? As bootlegs go, this one is a real doozy and worst of all, Batman has no cape! Mind you, if he is working with Mr Incredible, perhaps Edna Mode got rid.

THE CAPED COCK
(DOC JOHNSON, 2013)

At many points in his legacy Batman has been a tad cocky, but this is just ridiculous. You know a brand has become unstoppable when even sex toys are being moulded in its image (hell, there is even an image of a Batman logo butt plug out there!). Doc Johnson's explicit Bat appendage comes in Black (much like the Batmobile), and is without doubt the most rude object we have ever had on a merchandise feature (unlike the Batmobile). "A new league of heroes has just arrived to save you from boring bedroom play" reads the package (ahem), oh and it's phthalate-free - high five! And you thought nips on the Batsuit was a bit much...

JOKER LASER TARGET
(VANITY FAIR, 1976)

As Bane once said, "let the games begin" and with the aim of this game, you'd think he had a hand in designing it. Here's a toy that encourages you to be nothing like your favourite hero, as the aim of this Western-like shooting game is for youngsters to shoot dead a large cut-out of The Joker with their laser firearm. This game, as rare as it may be, entirely defeats the point of Batman. If this were his solution to everything, Gotham would have a morgue the size of Arkham. Yet weirdly, this was not the only vintage Batman toy to come along that tried to make Batman into more of a military man than a symbol of justice - see National Periodical Publication's Bat Grenades, Kenner's Batman Crossbow and Japan's tin toy Batman ray gun.

PLAYBOY VIGILANTES

BY ED FORTUNE

THE DARK KNIGHT ISN'T THE ONLY CRIME FIGHTER WITH DEEP POCKETS, AS WE WILL SEE AS WE LOOK AT SOME OF THOSE HEROES WHO WHEN NOT OUT WINING AND DINING ARE SLUGGING IT OUT WITH THE BAD GUYS...

BRUCE WAYNE

MARC SPECTOR

TONY STARK

SIMON WILLIAMS

FLASH GORDON

Fans love to point out that Batman doesn't have any super powers, but they always neglect to mention that as Bruce Wayne, he has access to the single power that dominates the modern world - he has wodges and wodges of cash. Bruce Wayne may spend most of his time dressed as a flying mouse looking to beat up the criminally insane, but in his spare time he does live a playboy lifestyle. He might claim that it's a 'cover' but let's be honest, being a rich party animal is always going to be the best way to relax after a busy week of hitting clowns. He's not alone of course; many crime fighters have worked out that conspicuous consumption is the best way to chill out.

Marc Spector, known to the street level thugs in the Marvel Universe as Moon Knight, is unique because, for him, being a millionaire playboy is almost an afterthought. Spector's origin story begins in Egypt, where he was hiring out his services as an elite mercenary. After an inevitable betrayal, a near-death experience and run in with the ancient moon god Khonshu, Marc becomes a changed man and devotes his life to defeating evil. Rather than simply going out there and punching purse snatchers, he does some actual detective work and forms a series of alter egos allowing him to infiltrate society better. Unlike Batman, Marc takes his disguises very seriously, though he does spend a lot of time as millionaire entrepreneur Steven Grant, living it up on the carefully-invested profits from Spector's mercenary days. Moon Knight's powers of strength and agility (granted to him by Khonshu) are more effective the more moon there is in the sky, so we like to think that he spends the darkest nights having a good boogie in his palatial manor.

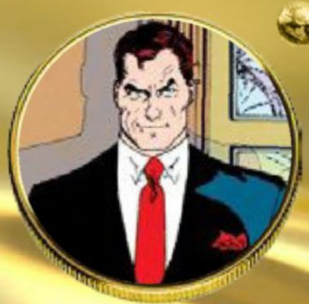
Staying in the world of mighty Marvel, we of course have the corporate answer to Batman, Tony Stark, otherwise known as Iron Man. In both the comic books and movies, Stark is a by-word for having a good time. The comic book version has the most fun of course; he's partied so hard in the past that he's outshone gods, and has then gone on to come up with some truly terribly ideas. Stark is the poster child for the perils of spending too much time having fun, with his love of partying crossing the line into dangerous addiction. More than one classic Iron Man story features Stark at the bottom of the bottle, but when he's on top form, he can party like the best of them and still be responsible enough to pilot one of the most dangerous weapons in comics. He's also had a string of lovers, including crazy assassin Madame Masque and director of S.H.I.E.L.D. Maria Hill. His womanising is another thing that lands him in hot water quite often and with a reputation like that, it's no surprise that he prefers to spend as much time as he can in a suit of high-tech powered armour.

Still in Tony Stark's playground, we come to the copyright claim-making Wonder Man, aka Simon Williams. The character started out in the pages of The Avengers as a villain of sorts. When Stark ruins his business, Simon is caught red handed embezzling cash from his own estate. In a desperate attempt to avoid jail time, Williams turns to supervillain Baron Zemo, who promptly experiments on the hapless fool. This results in Simon Williams becoming ion-powered hero Wonder Man, and he uses his powers to save the day. More importantly, Simon then went on to become a super-rich Hollywood actor, using his powers to save filmmakers a few quid in special effects. He's the Marvel hero most likely to slack off, and Wonder Man does spend an awful lot of time in the sun, sipping martinis and generally not having a care in the world.

Of course, not all heroes need a fancy moniker, especially if your name happens to be Flash Gordon. Movie fans will know Flash better as a football player, but Flash came from old money and continues to spend it, especially in the Kings Watch reboot where he single handily funds Zarkov's space plane project. Though he spends most of

JEFF TRACY

OLIVER QUEEN



LAMONT CRANSTON

DOCTOR JONAS VENTURE

XANDER CREWS

his time on far-off worlds punching all sorts of alien monsters, he's no stranger to turning on the charm when it comes to strange and exotic ladies and has had plenty of experience from his college days using his privilege and charm to turn heads.

Another playboy who doesn't need to hide behind a mask is of course Jeff Tracy. The founder of the Thunderbirds isn't a vigilante like most of them (far from it, in fact) but his sheer style makes him worth an honourable mention. Jeff earned his cash through civil engineering, construction and aerospace industries. Now he owns his own tropical island. Jeff leaves the actual hero business up to his sons, who spend most of their time dealing with one disaster after the other. Jeff, on the other hand, seems to spend an awful lot of his time with his shirt off in a tropical paradise, surrounded by beautiful people. Many heroes aspire to being as slick and as stylish as Jeff Tracy, but at the end of the day, we all know who Lady Penelope would want to go home with given half the chance.

Most people know the character of Oliver Queen from the TV show Arrow, but comic book readers know him better as the Green Arrow. Ollie has admitted in the books that he's modelled some of his crime fighting methods on Batman, even going so far that he called his own super hero lair The Arrow Cave. (Though in later versions, he renamed it The Quiver to avoid embarrassment.) Certainly, the Batman: The Brave and the Bold version of the hero tries to outdo Batman at every turn, especially when it comes to wine, women and spending money. In this, Ollie is the superior opponent. Queen rarely uses his playboy influence to help him fight crime, but then in the comics everybody knows who he is anyway. His wealth comes mostly from clever technological innovation, and though Green Arrow is better at spending money than making it, somehow he never seems to be short of a dollar.

Though Batman may well be the playboy hero that everybody knows, he wouldn't really exist if it wasn't for the grandfather of all rich crimefighters, The Shadow. This classic character is more a man of mystery than anything else, but like anyone else, he does like to slack off and have fun. Like both Batman and Moon Knight, one of his guises is that of 'wealthy young man about town', known as Lamont Cranston. The Shadow has been around since the '30s, so they've played with the format several times in the past; sometimes Cranston is a foppish young man who isn't actually The Shadow, but merely a pawn used by the hero to draw out villains. Most versions, however, give The Shadow some well-deserved R&R between crimefighting stints, as well as a nice big pool and a mini-bar.

Talking of classic style heroes, it's also worth bringing up two-fisted science cliché Doctor Jonas Venture, from Adult Swim's The Venture Brothers. A bronzed superman, Jonas was a science genius who left his son with a legacy far greater than one man could handle. The running gag throughout The Venture Brothers is that Jonas might have been able to use his wealth and power to save the world, but he was far better at being at a party, schmoozing with super models than he was as a dad.

Another Adult Swim hero in a similar sort of mould is Xander Crews, the clueless billionaire from the show Frisky Dingo. Thanks to a state of the art powersuit and a space station, Crews has gotten rid of most of the supervillains as his alter-ego, Awesome X. Crews uses his wealth (and identity as playboy and pornstar) to root out bad guys, but he's not terribly good at it.

The days of superheroes also being near-perfect men in all walks of life is far behind us these days, alas. Thanks to the insistence on gritty and realistic heroes, most costumed vigilantes are more Hugh Grant than Hugh Heffner, and that's a real shame. But we'll always have Batman, unless DC Comics decide to set the IRS on him, of course.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS FROM THE WORLDS OF DOCTOR WHO WITH PAUL MOUNT

DOCTOR WHO and the Ratings... Part Two

Series Eight of **Doctor Who** continues to post respectable UK TV ratings despite often finding itself uncomfortably scheduled opposite formidable opposition from ITV. In last month's column, we reported that "feature-length" series opener *Deep Breath* scored a consolidated figure of 9.17 million viewers and was the second highest-rated TV transmission of the week. Figures released more recently have indicated that the episode received over 970,000 requests on the BBC's popular iPlayer catch-up service. The current estimated 'final' numbers - including both live and VOSDAL viewing (Viewed on Same Day as Live) as well as screenings on BBC Three - is 10.76 million viewers.

The series has, it has to be said, seen its audience numbers fall since *Deep Breath*. This is not uncommon after the first episode of the series or, indeed, any new series. Second episode *Into The Dalek* saw the overnight figure drop to 5.2, suggesting that around a million and a half viewers who tuned in to Peter Capaldi's debut decided not to come back for the second episode. It also suggests that the Daleks, who appear annually in the series for contractual reasons, are not in any way the audience draw they once were. The consolidated figure for the episode was, however, a much more acceptable 7.29 million, once again the second-highest rated BBC programme of the week and rating only marginally behind two editions of ITV's 'talent' search **The X Factor**. Episode three, *Robot of Sherwood*, saw the overnight audience holding steady at 5.2 million followed by a very slight drop in the consolidated audience to 7.28 million. Steven Moffat's well-received fourth episode, *Listen*, took the overnight audience below 5 million, at 4.8 million but the episode rallied considerably on consolidation, rising to 7.01 million. Steve Thompson and Steven Moffat's *Time Heist* saw the series dip below the 7 million mark, bagging a slightly higher overnight audience of 4.93 million that consolidated to a final figure of 6.99. *The Caretaker*, written by Gareth Roberts and Steven Moffat and the first episode in the new run to be aired in the later timeslot of 8.30pm, and thus screening directly opposite ITV's ailing but still popular **X Factor**, drifted back to 4.89 million with its final ratings expected to settle at around 6.8 million. A consistent run of episodes featuring in the UK's Top Ten weekly chart ended when *Time Heist* found itself at no. 14 for the week behind returning ITV period drama **Downton Abbey**, BBC's **Great British Bake-Off**, episode two of ITV's successful three-part **Cilla** bio drama, **The X Factor** and several episodes of popular soaps **Coronation Street** and **EastEnders**, both of which are now starting to recover from their seasonal summer ratings slump.

Doctor Who's Audience Appreciation figures - collated from scores between 1 and 100 awarded by a special panel of 5,000 viewers - also remain steady if slightly down on the numbers typically recorded by **Doctor Who** in the last few years. Following *Deep Breath* and *Into the Dalek*, which scored AI figures of 82 and 84 respectively, *Robot of Sherwood* and *Listen* both scored 82, *Time Heist* scored 84 and *The Caretaker* scored 83. AI figures between 80 and 84 generally fall into the 'good' appreciation category for BBC statistical purposes. After six episodes Series Eight's average AI figure is 83 - as opposed to Series Six and Seven which scored a final average of 87 with Series Four - the final David Tennant season - scoring the highest average of the revived series with 88.

The ratings and AI information need to be viewed alongside an understanding of the way in which TV is now watched in the UK, and particularly the way in which the series has been scheduled this year. **Doctor Who** has been pitched into the typically aggressive autumn Saturday night schedule, traditionally dominated by the two talent show behemoths **The X Factor** and **Strictly Come Dancing**. Episode six saw the series bumped forward from the 7.30pm slot it had enjoyed for much of the new series (and where its last fifteen minutes clashed with the opening minutes of **The X Factor**) to 8.30pm. This is directly opposite **The X Factor** for its entire running time and immediately after **Strictly Come Dancing**, which in its early stages runs for over two hours. The BBC have clearly taken steps to avoid the **Strictly/X Factor** clash which the media and the public have complained about previously and have placed **Doctor Who** in the later slot as 'complementary' scheduling, safe in the knowledge that **Doctor Who**'s audience will seek the show out and find it in their own time. What's becoming increasingly clear is the fact that **Doctor Who**, in a busy schedule dominated by 'watch-on-the-night' light entertainment shows, is still figuring highly on many viewers' must-see catch-up lists and the show is not far away from reaching the point where its catch-up audience is bigger than its 'on the night' audience.

Whilst it's concerning that the series is still losing viewers week-on-week, **Doctor Who** still has an impressive 'reach' of upwards of 8 million unique viewers in the UK and its figures are still holding up well against higher-rating shows, many of which are posting significantly-lower ratings than they have in the past (i.e. **The X Factor**, **Downton Abbey**). More news on **Doctor Who**'s ratings progress in both the UK and an update on its performance in overseas territories next month.

This Month in DOCTOR WHO...

Dates for your diary. This month's **Doctor Who** episodes:

October 25th: *In the Forest of the Night* by Frank Cottrell Boyce

November 1st: *Dark Water* by Steven Moffat

November 8th: *Death in Heaven* by Steven Moffat (series finale)

Dates and transmission times (expected to be around 8.30 - 8.35pm in the UK on BBC One) are subject to change.

Obituaries

Scriptwriter Jane Baker who, along with her husband Pip, scripted a handful of **Doctor Who** serials in the 1980s, passed away on September 8th. She and her husband, who survives her, began writing in the 1960s and scripted several feature films as well as episodes of TV series such as **Space:1999**. In 1985, they entered **Doctor Who**'s orbit and wrote the script for *Mark of the Rani* during Colin Baker's first series as the Doctor. The episode introduced the iconic renegade female Time Lord The Rani played by the late Kate O'Mara. As the series fell into disarray, they returned to pen a four-episode story often referred to as *Terror of the Vervoids* for the truncated 1986 fourteen-episode *Trial of a Time Lord* story that returned the series to the screen after its infamous eighteen-month production hiatus in 1985. The Bakers also wrote Sylvester McCoy's infamous debut serial *Time and the Rani* in 1987 which, unsurprisingly, pitted O'Mara's returning Rani against the regenerated Doctor. After working on **Doctor Who** they went on to create the comedy drama **Watt on Earth** for Children's BBC.

Actor Maggie Stables, who played Sixth Doctor Colin Baker's occasional companion Evelyn Smythe in the Big Finish full-cast audio series, passed away after a long illness on September 26th. Maggie took up acting after a long career as a French teacher. After starring in a theatre production of **Jane Eyre**, alongside Big Finish's Nicholas Briggs (better known as the voice of the Daleks in the TV series) she found herself cast as Colin Baker's more mature companion Evelyn, a history professor who first appeared in the audio series in *The Marian Conspiracy*, released on 2000. Nicholas Briggs paid tribute to the actress on the Big Finish website: "*Evelyn Smythe made **Doctor Who** history. The first, dare I say it, 'elderly' companion of the Doctor's. Maggie was superb in the role and she and her Doctor, Colin Baker, immediately hit it off. And even though Maggie appeared in two 'final' adventures for Evelyn, it was always our intention to continue working with her - such is the advantage of time travel. I was very pleased to welcome her back for another trilogy in 2011. I shall always be grateful for the support and affection she gave to me and for all the laughs we shared along the way.*"

Christmas Special Casting

This year's traditional **Doctor Who** Christmas special episode has been filming in Cardiff during September. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the episode, written by Steven Moffat, will see the return of Victorian-era detective trio the Paternoster Gang, not seen since *Deep Breath* at the beginning of the series. The episode's cast is confirmed to include Nick Frost (**Spaced**, **Shaun of the Dead**, **Hot Fuzz**), Natalie Gumede (**Coronation Street**) and Michael Troughton, son of the late Patrick Troughton who played the second Doctor from 1966 to 1969. Also featuring in the cast is Nathan McMullen who played Finn in the last two series of E4's modern 'superhero' series **Misfits** and who was recently seen on BBC1's **The Driver**. The as-yet-untitled episode, which formally completes Peter Capaldi's first series, finished filming on October 3rd and is likely to be screened on BBC One on Christmas Day at around 7pm, and all over the world shortly afterwards.

A New Experience for Cardiff

This month sees the reopening of the popular interactive *Doctor Who Experience* at Cardiff Bay. The facility has been closed to the public since the end of the summer holidays to allow the entire attraction to undergo its own regeneration following the arrival of Peter Capaldi in the latest series. A major feature of the *Experience* was the interactive element in which the Doctor (Matt Smith in specially recorded new footage) guided visitors through a series of hazards and dangers as they took control of the TARDIS, and helped rescue him from the Pandorica 2 prison.

A newly scripted storyline - written by Joseph Lidster (**Torchwood**, **Sarah Jane Adventures**) and directed by Paul Wilmshurst (**Doctor Who**, **Da Vinci's Demons**) – allows fans to star in their very own mini episode of **Doctor Who**, beginning in the Gallifrey Museum and journeying to the heart of the TARDIS, while grappling with a threat which could destroy the universe. The exhibition space has also been refreshed, with new props from Peter Capaldi's debut series as well as sets and monsters from throughout the show's long history.

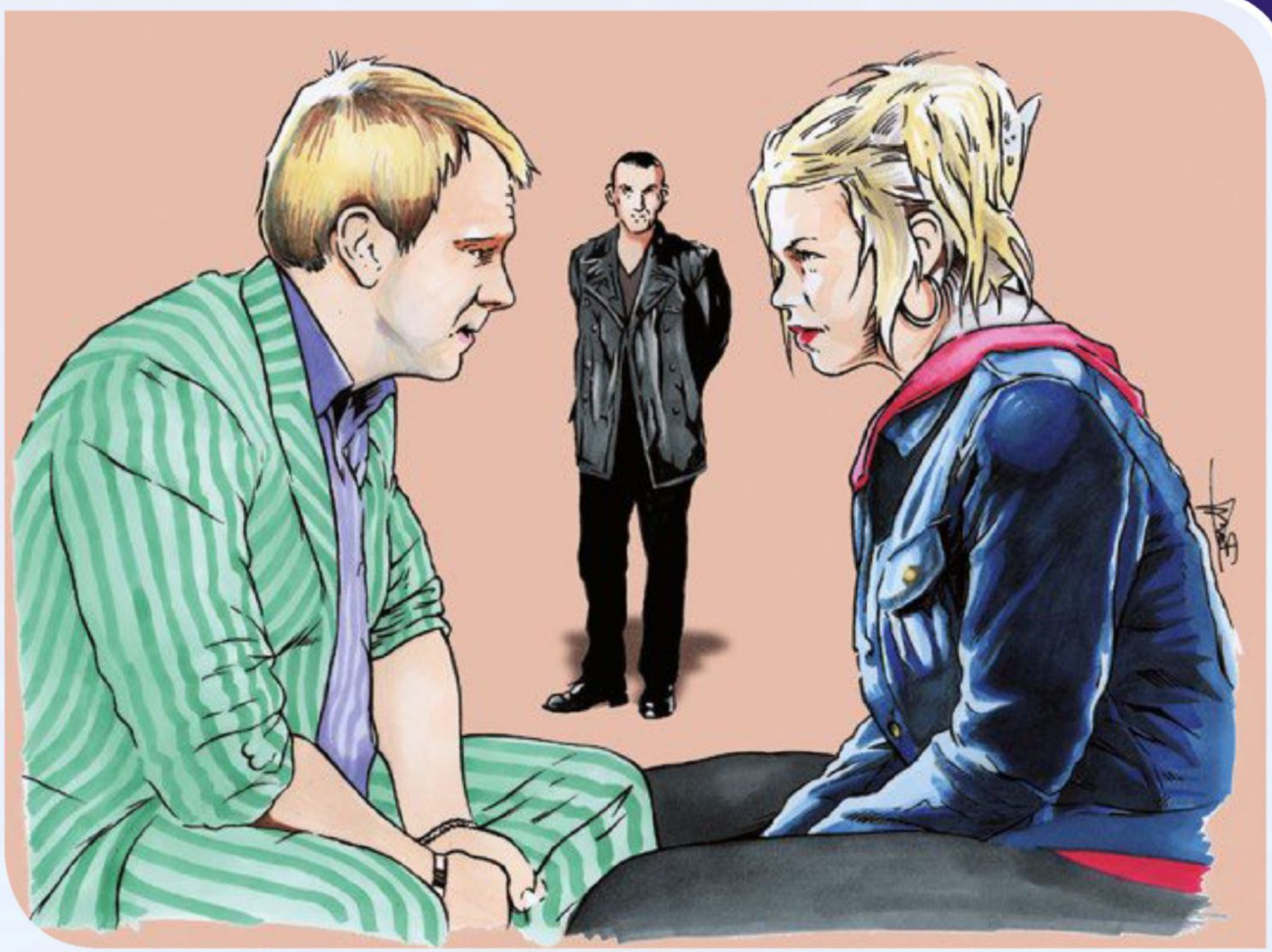
Fans and visitors will also shortly have the chance to once again not only visit the *Experience* itself - situated a stone's throw away from the Roath Lock Cardiff facility where the series is produced - but actually tour the show's official TARDIS control room set. From October 24th to November 30th, the highly popular studio set visits at Roath Lock Studios will also be available for fans to visit as an extra purchase. During this time, around 6000 fans will be able to visit the enclosed **Doctor Who** set, and set foot on the TARDIS featured in the past two series and the 50th anniversary special **The Day of the Doctor**. Stephen Davies, Director of Live Events and Entertainment at BBC Worldwide says, "*As with all of the best **Doctor Who** adventures, we've undergone our very own regeneration down at the **Doctor Who Experience** and we're sure **Doctor Who** fans will be thrilled to take part in a brand new adventure with the Twelfth Doctor.*"

Tickets are on sale now at **doctorwhoexperience.com** for dates on or after October 24th.

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE WHONIVERSE

GUEST COLUMNIST ALED WILLIAMS



The still-glistening rebirth of *Doctor Who* was only eight weeks old when it dropped its tribute to Father's Day in May 2005; a month early. It broke emotional limits, dramatic expectations and hearts, and the echoes can still be heard today.

Russell T Davies was determined to ensure the relaunched series would be tethered to something viewers would find accessible, everyday, and identifiable; Kronkburgers would now be served with a side order of chips as standard. Davies stated publicly that as a child, he was more interested in being the Doctor's companion than the Time Lord and this was how he approached reintroducing the series to a potentially massive mainstream BBC One Saturday night audience. The first seven weeks of adventures, filtered through Rose Tyler's eyes, rolled out carefully; each building on the last until *Dalek* reintroduced the other headline act. This change of perspective made the Doctor's oldest enemies unfamiliar, dangerous, and frightening again, as well as controversially emotional. Since the launch, Davies had been subtly turning up the emotional beats running though the base of the series until, by *Father's Day,* these were sitting noticeably higher in the mix than ever before.

Scripted by Paul Cornell, *Father's Day* was first sketched out to be stylistically reminiscent of *The Twilight Zone*. Envisioned as being a low-key, CGI-free episode, the story was to show Rose's fallibility, adding further depth to her character. Davies also stated that he wanted Rose to have her own mythology, something comparable to the Doctor's. The tragedy of Rose having lost her father at an early age instantly gave the character the motivation to ask to be taken somewhere so obviously off-limits. Davies was aware that now the mainstream audience were along for the ride, there were some tricky questions they would want to ask, and this would show him having anticipated this, that he was willing to provide answers. Only two weeks earlier, the audience had watched a Dalek levitating up the stairs, ruining over forty-years'-worth of newspaper cartoons.

The Dalek/stairs interface enigma, along with the issue of why the Doctor couldn't just travel back in time to change unfair events, had, in fact, both already been addressed in the twentieth century series. A Dalek hovered gingerly towards a perturbed Sylvester McCoy in the first cliffhanger of 1988's *Remembrance of the Daleks* and the law against time meddling had arisen so often it had been

given a name. The Blinovitch Limitation Effect was cited in *Day of the Daleks*, *Earthshock,* and *Mawdryn Undead* (to name just three) and the outcome of shattering it is actually demonstrated in *Father's Day*. When Rose touches her infant self, she creates a time paradox and a Reaper eats the Doctor as a result.

At this point, time travel is neither wibbly nor wobbly, it's as dangerous as the ocean and it has teeth; the killer-car-of-destiny circles the church like a shark, waiting. Consequences and responsibility are the key themes in this episode but it's the volume that they're dialled up to that echoes throughout subsequent stories; well into the Steven Moffat era, and right up to *The Day of the Doctor*.

There are two moments in *Father's Day* that, arguably, helped extend the emotional range of *Doctor Who*. The first of these was a quote from Paul Cornell's father – "*I'm your dad. It's my job for it to be my fault.*" The second was the dialogue-free close-up of actor Sean Dingwall. The shot lasted for an unbroken eighteen seconds and showed the moment that Pete came to truly understand the situation, his responsibilities and the ramifications of the only course of action. It's a testament to Davies' trust in director Joe Ahearne that nearly half of the shot was silent.

Billie Piper described *Father's Day* as both emotionally taxing to record and her favourite story that year, despite Rose being fed through a grinder (emotional rather than *The Seeds of Doom*-literal) set to a surprisingly brutal level of punishment. The Doctor's companions have suffered through the years but these torments usually turn out to be temporary inconveniences with no lasting scars. Usually.

Doctor Who was no stranger to noble sacrifice. Terry Nation would routinely throw one or two into most of his scripts along with aggressive vegetation, production teams used it as a companion exit-strategy several times (twice in *The Daleks' Master Plan*) and the Doctor routinely offered his life to save a companion. Or so you'd think. In fact, the Doctor hasn't accepted his responsibilities as often as we're led to believe, often opting to sidestep them altogether. The Doctor's duty of care had only been tested to its full extent once before *Father's Day,* in *The Caves of Androzani,* when he gave Peri the few remaining drops of queen-bat milk antidote knowing he'd succumb to a nasty case of spectrox toxaemia as a result. When the Doctor dies in *Father's Day*, it's the first time this has ever happened and it takes Pete's selfless suicide to rewrite time and ensure that the programme can even continue. The Doctor returned the favour to Pete a little over a month later when, on the eve of Father's Day 2005, he regenerated into David Tennant to save Rose from the effects of an undigested time vortex.

Paul Cornell's third series story *Human Nature* was a mash-up of his original New Adventures novel and an extended remix of rearranged themes from *Father's Day*. Once again, the events occurred as a direct result of the Doctor's actions but he abrogated his responsibility and the innocent John Smith was forced into an unwilling suicide so the Time Lord could rise again, which is more the way you'd expect the Master to go about things. The Doctor kept martyrdom to a minimum until *The End of Time*, when he took Wilf's place in a radiation doom cabinet. He wasn't happy about having to do it then either.

In the classic series, the shocking death of Peri midway through *The Trial of a Time Lord* had been hastily rewritten by the epic's conclusion, becoming a variation of "*She went to live on a farm.*" Adric's noble sacrifice in *Earthshock*, along with those of Katarina and Sara Kingdom in *The Daleks' Master Plan*, apparently had more of a lasting emotional impact on the audience than the Doctor. However, in these cases, the Doctor was trapped as a helpless observer. *Father's Day* represented a shift in the level of emotional reality that *Doctor Who* was willing to address, dealing with death and loss without dilution. There was, however, a trade-off to deepening this emotional resonance. Showing the death of a companion now would be almost impossible.

The Steven Moffat era of *Doctor Who* contains echoes of the emotional beats of *Father's Day*, but constrains them more within the form of the experimental one-off: *Vincent and the Doctor* and *The Girl Who Waited* both put characters through a hefty, but brief, emotional bludgeoning. What's not been taken on are the aspects dealing with the harrowing fallout that accompanies death. Rory died so many times that memes comparing him to *South Park*'s perpetually doomed Kenny popped up, and latest companion Clara showed similar tendencies toward temporary expiration. The exits of Susan (*The Dalek Invasion of Earth*), Jo (*The Green Death*), Sarah Jane (*The Hand of Fear*), Romana (*Warrior's Gate*), Tegan (*Resurrection of the Daleks*), Rose (*Doomsday*), Donna (*Journey's End*) and the Ponds (*The Angels Take Manhattan*) all exact a short-lived emotional toll on the Doctor. Every time a companion exits *Doctor Who* is different. The majority are handled with swift sensitivity, a gentle reminder of the potential finality contained within every goodbye.

Pete Tyler's death, however, altered *Doctor Who* forever. His selfless sacrifice earned the show the potential, and necessary, narrative equipment to mount expeditions exploring rawer emotional stories at a depth previously considered far too dangerous. *Father's Day* answered a question that no-one remembered asking and showed us humanity at its most glorious while doing so. That's definitely something worth celebrating.

Art by Simon Brett

REVIEWS

NEW WHO RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

THE BLOOD CELL

AUTHOR: JAMES GOSS
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Doctor's been imprisoned – for heinous, unnameable crimes - aboard a high security, inescapable prison built into an asteroid far in the future. The trouble is, the Doctor keeps trying to escape; he certainly has free run of the complex and its cells and corridors and whilst he seems in no hurry to leave, it's not entirely clear exactly what he's doing there in the first place. Every now, again a pert young girl comes to visit, standing out on the landing platform waving placards because the prison's red tape won't allow her access to the building. But all is not well aboard the prison; there are constant power outages and there seems to be something mysterious and bloodthirsty stalking the lower levels...

The Blood Cell sees regular BBC Books contributor James Goss make his first stab at capturing the new Doctor/Clara partnership in print and, by and large, he's nailed the pair of them. Although they're apart for much of the story when they finally meet their bantering love/hate relationship is much as we've seen it on screen. The Doctor – or Prisoner 428 as he's generally referred to – is recognisably Peter Capaldi too. Whilst Goss gives us little in the way of physical description of the Time Lord – "he had a face made for fury and was making the most of it" is one of the best - beyond the fact that he looks a bit tired and old now and again, his mannerisms and behaviour are very much as seen on TV. The Doctor is brittle, blunt, and sometimes breathtakingly rude. He's also occasionally a little bit kinder than we've yet seen in the TV series; a very moral man trying to do the right thing but not necessarily absolutely sure why.

Some fans might feel uncomfortable with the book's first person narrative; the story unfolds through the eyes of the Governor, a jaded, broken, and dejected man whose past glories are way behind him and who really just wants a quiet life at his latest billet. But Goss makes the Governor interesting and a little bit pitiful as events and circumstances spiral out of his control and his isolated, half-forgotten prison falls into chaos and confusion. The 'Blood Cell' of the story contains the book's monster, a great nasty blob composed of body parts. It's a grisly and graphic image and Goss wisely, for the benefit of younger readers, goes easy on the gore and allows the imagination to do all the hard work in visualising something appalling inhuman. Also on hand are the Custodians, the prison's robot guards who have a handy line in death rays and whirling claws and blades.

Pacey, highly readable, and ingenious, The Blood Cell might irritate those hoping for a more traditional Doctor Who yarn. For example, the TARDIS is a no-show here even though it's obliquely referenced from time to time. Goss has, however, made a decent fist of writing a very different kind of Doctor Who story from an entirely original perspective but which, at its heart, is still Doctor Who through and through.

PAUL MOUNT

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THE CRAWLING TERROR

AUTHOR: MIKE TUCKER
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Mike Tucker has written numerous books and audios for Doctor Who and is one of the first to write for the Twelfth Doctor. The Crawling Terror contains many familiar ingredients such as stone circles, GM crops, mad scientists and an essentially English village. It is what Mike does with them that makes this book a pleasure to read.

The story is set in and around the village of Ringstone, whose inhabitants find themselves suddenly assaulted by a range of giant insects. Matters worsen as the Doctor and Clara arrive to find that sinister alien forces (aren't they always!) are at work trying to repeating certain events from World War II.

The village of Ringstone gets its name from the local standing stone circle once bombed by the Nazis and now close to the new science laboratories on the edge of town. The Doctor has to identify just what is happening while Clara gets imprisoned and used as a pawn in a stand-off between a deranged scientist and the Doctor. If that wasn't enough, the military are waiting nearby to resolve matters in the way they know best. There are several characters in the story, from the local vet, the village bobby, and the inquisitive schoolboy. These are not just there for the ride but also move the story along; they give the reader something familiar to hold on to as the giant insects wreak terror, and Mike Tucker does well not to dip too far into the horrific elements of this tale, but far enough to be unsettling.

The Crawling Terror packs in the action and enough elements for several stories, yet does this without becoming ridiculous. We also very much recognise the new, Twelfth Doctor from the writing and his updated relationship with Clara. Overall this is an enjoyable book and is recommended.

TONY JONES

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Horror Obscura

This month, the Mexican-munching Martin Unsworth looks at a film with connections to David Lynch that seems to have been overlooked for far too long.

Perdita Durango

Although not strictly a horror film, *Perdita Durango* certainly contains enough moments to put it well within our remit, and is genuinely terrifying at times. Based on the novel *59° and Raining: The Story of Perdita Durango* by Barry Gifford, which was the third part of the 'Sailor and Lula series' (there were seven books in total), and, as one would expect, takes place within the same universe as the author's *Wild at Heart*, famously committed to celluloid so brilliantly by David Lynch. Spaniard Álex de la Iglesia directed, and it was his first film made mostly in English. It bore all the trademarks one had come to expect from the controversial filmmaker: graphic violence, often offset by a twisted sense of humour.

A sumptuous shot of Perdita (Rosie Perez) sleeping, while a jaguar

pulls a silk sheet from her naked body, opens the film; it's a motif that will symbolise her relationship with her co-antagonist. She jumps back to reality with a start as she wakes at a table in an airport. After dismissing - with an acid tongue - a sleaze-ball software salesman who's trying his luck, we discover that Perdita is heading to a Mexican cemetery to scatter the ashes of her sister, Juana, who has been murdered by her husband.

Before crossing the border back to the States, she catches the eye of Romeo Dolorosa (Javier Bardem), an over-confident criminal with a terrible hairstyle and snakeskin boots (complete with the heads still attached), who has just robbed a bank. The heist demonstrates his manic demeanour, as he risks a clean getaway by forcing one of the tellers to open her top to show him her breasts. After removing his El Santo mask outside, he grabs a stranger, passionately kissing her, in order to evade the attention of the police dashing to the scene. He also double-crosses his partner, knocking him over in a stolen van and leaving him for dead. Romeo convinces Perdita to cross the border with him, but she's alarmed to see the corpse laying on the back seat, which has been freshly snatched from the same cemetery she scattered Juana. Naturally, she thinks the border patrol will discover the body, but Romeo places his necklace talisman on the sheet covering the remains, and recites a short chant; the guard allows the car to pass. Romeo is a practitioner of Santeria, an ancient religion that grants power and luck in exchange for blood sacrifices. Although they don't normally practice the religious rituals of Santeria in Mexico, it is more prevalent in Cuba, and it's usually animals that are sacrificed rather than humans, although that in itself brings its own controversies. The corpse will later take center stage in an elaborate ceremony; being chopped into pieces in front of a baying crowd of tourists while Romeo stuffs his face into a pile of cocaine. Unseen at the back is an investigator from the Drugs Enforcement Agency, Woody Dumas (James Gandolfini), surreptitiously filming the proceedings. Dumas is an intriguing character, a rogue officer doing anything he can in order to get his target, which now includes our titular antagonist. When he's spying on Perdita as she goes shopping, the film subverts the smooth/hard-ass cop trait by having him casually follow her across a road, only to run down by a car. It's the first of what would be a running gag, as it happens several times during the course of the film, with Dumas the main victim (although there is another, which comes as just as much of a jolt). These accidents happen as they would in real life, with no warning, just utter seat-jumping shock. Naturally, our response is laughter, no matter how painful the collision looks.

Romeo and his sidekick, Adolfo (legendary musician Screamin' Jay Hawkins) go to a meeting with gangland boss Mr. Santos (a gnarly and terrifying Don Stroud), who gives him a job: to take a truckload of frozen foetuses across the border to Las Vegas. Santos intends to use to make cosmetics, "*like the Nazis made soap out of the Jews*", he calmly tells him. Romeo's spiritual power will no doubt give him the edge over the border patrol. When he gets to Vegas, he is to meet his cousin Reggie (played by Javier's brother, Carlos Bardem) where he will receive the rest of his money.

Meanwhile, the thrill of being with Romeo is getting Perdita excited and she suggests they kill a 'gringo'. With his big job on the horizon, Romeo requires another sacrifice, so they kidnap a young couple in the middle of a busy street. Duane (Harley Cross) and Estelle (Aimee Graham, Heather's sister) are two seemingly clean-cut kids out for a good

time. They didn't expect that their evening would end with them bundled into the back of a car and forced to endure Romeo and Perdita dancing to Herb Albert's *Spanish Flea*. At first they are treated with a modicum of respect, Romeo attempts to explain his religious philosophy to a faux-interested Duane. However, Estelle is more proactive, managing to knock out Adolfo and take his gun. Perdita gets the better of her, and punishes her by making her kiss the sole of her boot. It gets worse as the evil twosome decide to show their dominance over the youngsters by assaulting them. While rape is always nasty and unpleasant, in *Perdita Durango* it's doubly so. Perdita straddles Duane in a corridor, during which he has a flashback to the only other time he has had sex (with an overweight girl from school), while Romeo forces himself on Estelle. Perdita's teasing of Duane stops suddenly, as she forces him to watch as the horrific attack on Estelle continues. Perdita tells him her attitude, "*The two greatest pleasures in life are fucking and killing*". Romeo and Perdita have a volatile relationship; despite their obvious liberal sexual views, Perdita appears to be jealous when sleazy Romeo abuses Estelle. So much so, they have a slap-fight in the desert, which ends with a sex session almost as violent! Surreally, at the 'pivotal' moment, a fighter jet roars randomly overhead.

The torture doesn't stop for the young captives, though. Neither physically nor mentally, as the pair are primed for the ceremony by being stripped and feathered. As the sacrifice only requires one of them, Romeo holds a vote to choose who it should be; with all four of them democratically having a say. This naturally brings up some bitchiness, with the kids voting for each other. This leaves the deciding vote to Adolfo, who without missing a breath chooses Estelle. Perdita again forces Duane to watch on helplessly as Romeo builds the baying audience to near hysteria once more with his flamboyant satanic actions. She is saved at the very last minute by the intervention of the bandito that Romeo double-crossed at the bank. Only this time he has brought his posse who burn the place down, although not before Perdita and Romeo manage to escape, their hostages in tow. Meanwhile, lurking just out of sight, is DEA officer Dumas. Despite not having any jurisdiction in Mexico, he has taken a couple of rangers down to keep an eye on things. This leads to them following the outlaws to their rendezvous with Santos' truck. Romeo has other things on his mind, though. During the mêlée at the ceremony he lost his lucky pendant, and with that gone, perhaps his powers have too. It certainly looks like things are starting to go against him.

Dumas, meanwhile, finds them at the truck; confronting them before they can drive away with their cache of frozen foetuses. A fierce gun battle breaks out, with blood and bullets flying all around. This leaves the two rangers, and Santos' men dead, and Romeo and Perdita back on the run.

During Romeo's getaway, the articulated truck runs over one of Santos' men, squashing his body like a pancake, but also loses some of its cargo. When the FBI and state police arrive, there are several smashed jars on the floor, their contents lying pitifully on the ground. DEA agent Doyle (played by *Repo Man* director Alex Cox in his inimitable dry style) casually, but mournfully picks one up, instructing an uncomfortable-looking agent to give it a proper burial. Once again, Dumas finds himself on an ambulance stretcher, and as usual, he's not interested in treatment. His determination, however, is stronger than his body.

Out on the road again, this time the crew are split up between the car and the truck,

Perdita is none too happy at having to listen to Estelle's mundane ramblings, while Romeo and Duane appear to be bonding. He tells his captor that his parents are in Europe, on a holiday they won by taking part in a TV contest, "*It was the worst experience of my life... until now*". He proclaims that all memories are sad; to which, Romeo tells him of one which was not. When he was a child, someone brought movies to his little village, screening them in his uncle's barn. A film that had a profound effect on him was the 1954 Robert Aldrich film *Vera Cruz*. The climax, he tells him, in which Burt Lancaster is felled by Gary Cooper is the perfect ending for that man. "*The true path to sainthood*", he muses. *Perdita Durango* shares its biggest parallels in this film, so much so that the climax mirrors the western classic directly. While Gandolfini's Dumas is nowhere near as clean-cut as Gary Cooper is, the relentless pursuit is comparable.

His chase is far from easy though, as not only do Romeo and Perdita want to see the back of him, but so does Santos, who sends his men after him. It's a film of anti-heroes; Romeo has *some* redeemable qualities; Perdita lets the kids go before attempting to save her lover. Even Dumas, despite his dogged pursuit, allows her to walk free; presumably so the chase can begin again or perhaps because she was never the target.

Throughout the film, we meet many degenerate and transgressive characters. There aren't many that have any redeemable qualities. Santos, while a nasty piece of work, clearly is more depraved than we could possibly imagine. At one point, he conducts a meeting to discuss getting rid of Dumas while hosting a children's party - in which he is also doubling as the clown. Later, he is seen chastising a small, crying girl, "*You should not bite",* he scolds, making it sickeningly clear what has just been happening. Another bizarre character is Romeo's friend, whom he leaves the kids and Perdita with while he goes to the climactic meeting with Reggie, who is a one-armed ex-marine. Ironically, Estelle's father, who has taken it on himself to track them down, spots them going into his house, but he is mowed down by a car before the youngster could see him.

Dreams play a symbolic part of Perdita's story. From the opening sequence already mentioned, to the recurring vision of her sister and her children being slain by her crazed husband, before he turns the gun on himself.

While possessing neither the elegance nor flair of Lynch, de la Iglesia does manage to utilise his not-inconsiderable style into fleshing out the characters from Gifford's novel who had previously been small players in *Wild at Heart*. Perez seems a natural for the half-Mexican hit-woman, a one-time cohort of Sailor Ripley, as opposed to the earlier film in which she was played by Isabella Rossellini. Also appearing in this story is gangster Marcelles Santos (J.E. Freeman in Lynch's film), and the demented killing duo Reggie San Pedro (Calvin Lockhart) and Juana Durango (Grace Zabriskie), although the latter is already dead by the time the story takes place.

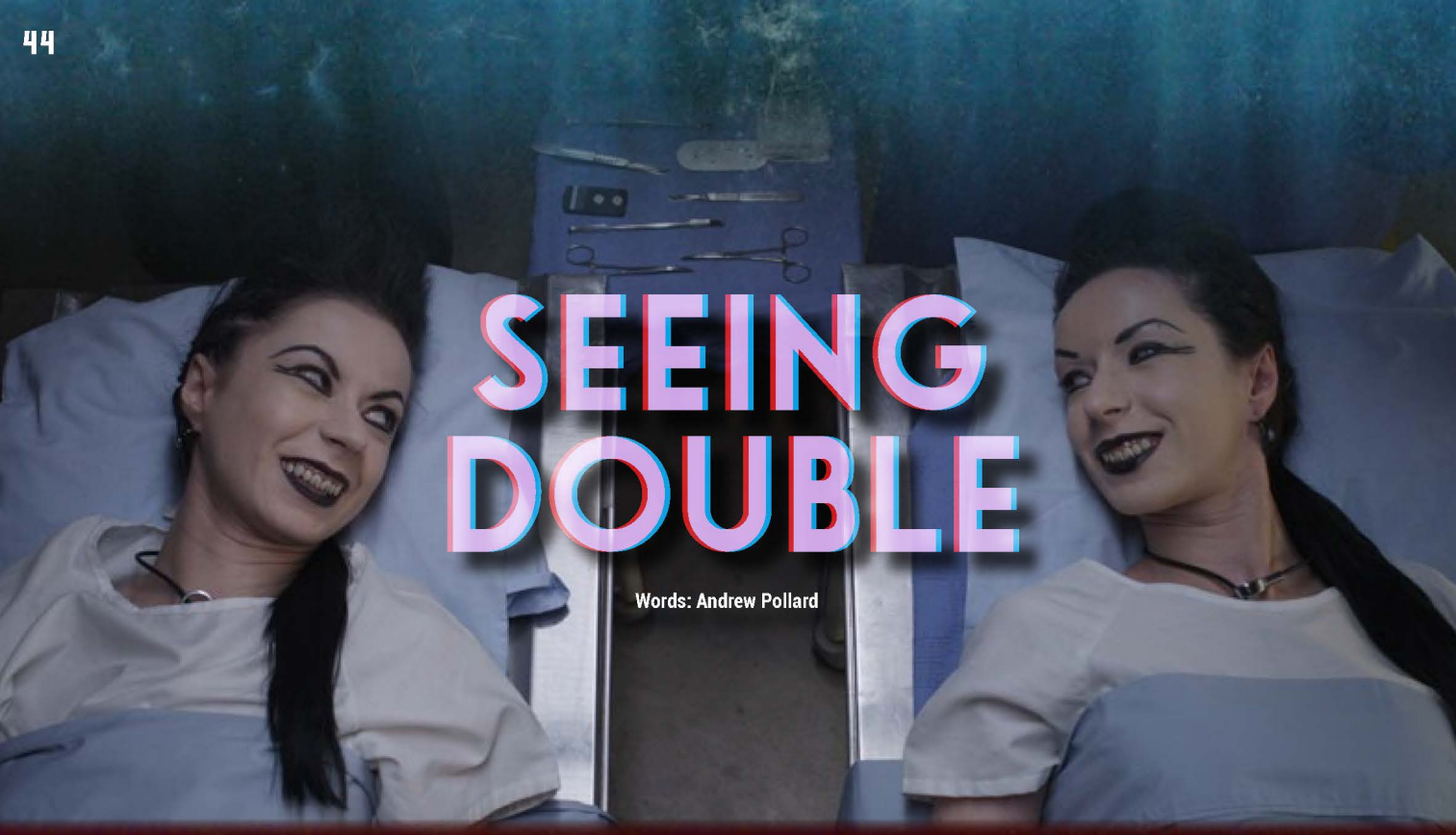
Both Lynch and Tarantino clearly influenced de la Iglesia; not only with the frequent narrative jumps illustrating the characters' stories, but also in some shots. The first time Romeo sees Perdita, it is in a reflection on a CD case. She is the spitting image of Uma Thurman's Mia Wallace, posed with her cigarette and cleavage exposed. Estelle's parents are as 'apple pie' as they come, displaying a bizarre detachment with the real world; father, Herb (Roger Cudney), even has his own motto, "*Always be in control*", which he modifies when forced to head out after his daughter behind the back

of the police. The presence of Screamin' Jay Hawkins as Romeo's rubber-faced assistant is the sort of casting touch which Lynch himself would have added (Hawkins had already appeared in Jim Jarmusch's 1989 cult hit, *Mystery Train*).

As in *Wild at Heart*, steamy sex scenes pepper the film, but whereas Lynch filmed these graphic, passionate scenes with style, panache, and a diffused glow, Romeo and Perdita's couplings are sweaty, violent, and dangerous; the less said about how nasty the rape scene is, the better. While completely necessary for the story, it is an uncomfortable viewing experience. *Wild at Heart* wasn't Gifford's only work with Lynch, as he later co-wrote *Lost Highway* (1997) with the director, as well as a couple of episodes of his forgotten TV series, *Hotel Room* (1993).

When presented to the BBFC in November 1998, James Ferman was still at the helm, and despite attitudes changing, the film still ran into issues. Both the double rape scene and the later sequence in which a character watches the Manga film, *Urotsukidoji II: Legends of the Demon Womb* on television caused problems, and initially saw thirty-six seconds cut from the UK version. While this might not seem like much, the version submitted was the international version, which had already had six minutes excised. In America, where the film was released as *Dance with the Devil*, two versions surfaced; a heavily cut print that ran 115 minutes, as well as an 'unrated' 121 minute version. Frustratingly, this version actually cuts a further four minutes, even though it restored some pre-cut footage. When finally released as uncut as possible in the UK, the submitted running time was just under 124 minutes. The Australian version lost the whole scene between Santos and Reggie, primarily due to the paedophile implication, but in removing the entire meeting, and subsequent dialogue, a number of key plot points are lost to the viewer. Apparently, a Spanish version runs some ten minutes longer. However, even in the cut version, the film still has the ability to shock, and the unexpurgated version may go a little too far for some. Nevertheless, it's a powerful, startling, upsetting, and yet compelling film, which still manages to coax a smile during all the grimness. One change in the American release, which is unfathomable, is the removal of the *Vera Cruz* homage at the climax, in which Romeo imagines Dumas is Gary Cooper, striding over to finish him off. The picture morphs into the Aldrich classic and allows Romeo a strange dignity to his death. Some of the earlier moments featuring the western were removed, on what was assumed copyright grounds, which would make sense, except very brief glimpses remain during Romeo's story of going to see the film as a child. The change at the end neuters the whole finale; fortunately, providing one avoids the *Dance with the Devil* variant, all is well.

De la Iglesia burst onto the world horror scene in 1993 with the madcap *Acción mutante*, but it is probably the stunning *El día de la bestia* (*The Day of the Beast*, 1995) which he is most famous for, which was released just prior to making *Perdita Durango*. Although he has a firm cult fan base, he has failed to cross over into the mainstream as much as someone like Guillermo del Toro. Whether that's due to his choice of outrageous subject matter (even the 2010 film *The Last Circus* was disturbing) or lack of real promotion is anyone's guess. He has returned to the outlandishly slapstick style of yore with his latest release, *Witching and Bitching* (*Las brujas de Zugarramurdi*), which has been doing the festival circuit and won eight Goya Awards (Spain's main national film award). With any luck, it won't be too long before it gets a proper release.



SEEING DOUBLE

Words: Andrew Pollard

In a genre so often depicted as being dominated by males, the Soska sisters, Jen and Sylvia, have been making quite the name for themselves in horror over the last few years. The delightfully devilish duo burst onto the scene with 2009's DEAD HOOKER IN A TRUNK before giving fans the fantastic AMERICAN MARY. Up next for the girls is WWE Studios' SEE NO EVIL 2 and THE ABCS OF DEATH 2, with plenty stacking up on the plate of these Canadian twins. We had the pleasure of chatting to the Soskas about their current projects, their upcoming work, PAINKILLER JANE, Dean Cain being a badass, how they handle themselves in a genre that's so male-heavy, and how horror fans either want to marry them and keep them in a dungeon or murder them slowly in front of their family...

STARBURST: Starting with your current movie, how did you end up involved with *See No Evil 2* in the first place?

Sylvia Soska: It's so funny. Our agent told us that we had a script that we needed to read right away. We've read so many scripts after *American Mary*, and all of them basically wanted us to make *American Mary* again but not call it *American Mary*; just a sexy surgeon starring Katharine Isabelle. So we didn't read it right away. We got a call from him again asking if we'd read it, it's actually a script emergency. Jen and I are huge WWE fans - we started watching way back when Kane's character was first introduced. We watched the movie [*See No Evil*] when it was released in theaters. So we're reading it and we're like, "*No way! This can't actually be an offer for us!*"

Jen Soska: They said to keep an open mind because they had no idea that we were huge WWE fans. The only thing that could've made it sweeter was if The Undertaker was in it. Everyone is a wrestling fan at one point in their lives. I was trying to get people to come back to wrestling, telling them, like, "*You should watch now!*"

Sylvia: Yeah, Vince McMahon gives us a quarter every time someone starts watching again.

And so you were fans of the first movie then?

Sylvia: You know, I liked seeing Glenn "Kane" Jacobs in a movie but I thought that there were some missed opportunities. I'm a big horror nerd – Jen and I watch every horror movie from around the world, whether it's good, whether it's bad – and I just thought he's such a unique individual. Just to have him going round gouging out eyes for 72 minutes...

Jen: It became a little bit repetitive. One of the other missed opportunities is when you have a horror icon like Michael Myers, Pinhead or Freddy Krueger, they have a look that you can dress up as - they have a cosplayable look. They have a mask, they have a uniform, and they have a series of weapons. I thought that was a real missed opportunity in the first one. As soon as we saw that we were doing it, we said, "*He needs to wear a mask. Look at the message boards; everyone wants him to wear a mask.*"

Sylvia: And it was really cool. The studio was very supportive in us doing that. It's so funny, because homicide is our job. I'm not going to tell you how many people die but it was just so fun to be, like, "*Okay, this person dies but how do we kill them? Well we have to only use*

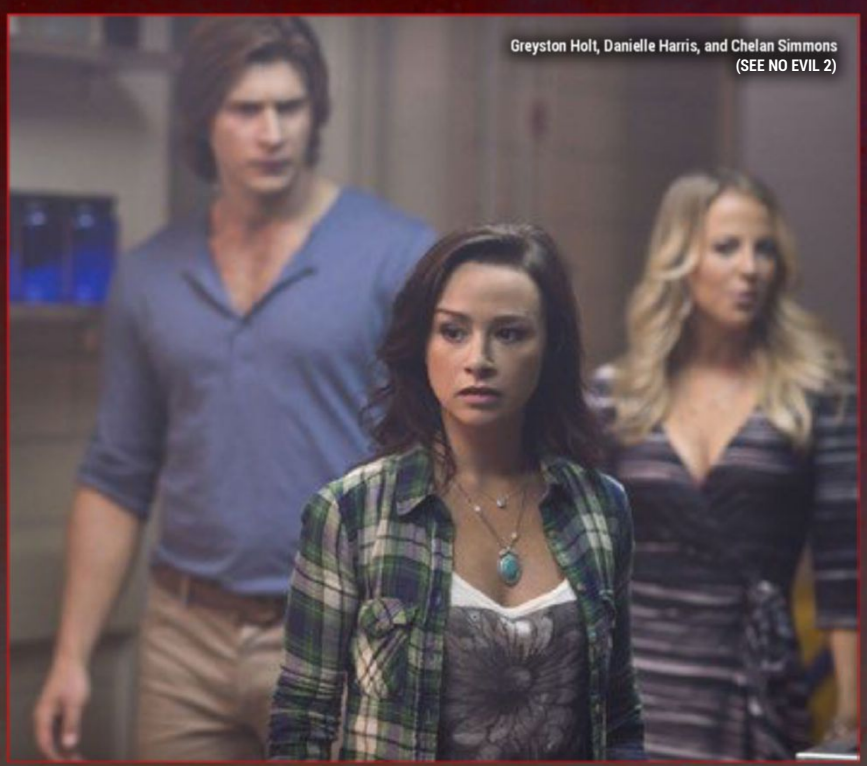
tools that you find in a morgue."
Jen: I do have one Joss Whedon kill in there.
Sylvia: Yeah, Jen has a good kill.

How did you try and differentiate Jacob Goodnight from those horror icons you mentioned?
Jen: Well it was important for us to establish what his mythology is. With Jacob, he has an overbearing religious mother, and we had to separate that from Norman Bates as well. A lot of his anguish is shown in the film, so you kind of get the reason that he's killing. Of course, it's the classic slasher thing of he doesn't like people sinning or having sex or fooling round!
Sylvia: It's a very self-aware slasher love letter. A lot of the cinematography and little moments in it, especially if you're a wrestling fan, there's little things that we see sneaked in through the whole thing just to be, like, "*Hey, look at that!*"
Jen: But it was also important to make Glenn Jacobs, Kane, and Jacob Goodnight all three different characters.

Kaj-Erik Eriksen as Seth, and Katherine Isabelle as Tamara (SEE NO EVIL 2)

Given the setting of the film, was Rick Rosenthal's *Halloween II* an influence on you at all?
Sylvia: Yes, absolutely! It's so much like *Halloween II* because the first movie ends and the second movie picks up right as the body's being brought to the morgue. No time's passed even though there's been several years between the movies.
Jen: Yeah, and of course *Halloween II* is the same kind of thing. It's also, you get locked in a location with somebody who's supposed to be dead and now coming back from the dead. In the third one – I hope there is a third one – I'd like to pick up right from where this one left off.

Whilst on the topic of the *Halloween* series, in a genre that is seen as being so dominated by men, was somebody like Debra Hill a big influence on you getting involved in horror?
Sylvia: Actually, Mary Harron is what got us started. Before I even knew what *American Psycho* was, I saw her in a press conference talking about the artistic merit of *American Psycho* while they were trying to get it thrown out of Toronto because it promoted violence against women. And the questions were so negative but she replied so eloquently and intelligently about everything. I was, like, "*Who is this woman, and what is this movie?*" And now *American Psycho* is one of our favourite films. Just seeing how she changed the stereotypical way that you look at people who make film, especially horror film, and give more of the artistic reasoning behind it. I was, like, "*Gosh, I didn't know that type of person existed – I wanna be like her!*"
Jen: Stephen King was a massive influence as well. The first novels either of us read were Stephen King novels. He has this beautiful way of doing fucked up stuff but he's got this really dark sense of humour. When I was growing up, I just began to realise and feel that horror is supposed to have humour in it, which is kind of nice as it's an audience betrayal.

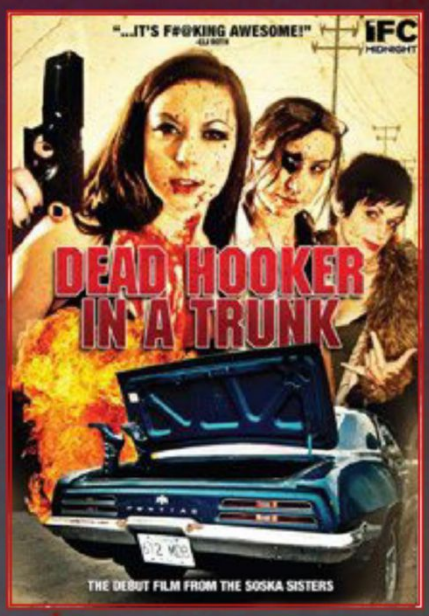

Greyston Holt, Danielle Harris, and Chelan Simmons (SEE NO EVIL 2)

Danielle Harris and Kaj-Erik Eriksen (SEE NO EVIL 2)

Now you guys were thrown into the horror spotlight in a big way with *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*. How was it to go from just two girls at film school to all of a sudden people seeing the film and really liking it?

Sylvia: It's really funny because at first nobody wanted *Dead Hooker*. We would send it to film festivals and based on the title alone they'd say that they don't show movies like that. We just wanted guys to watch it and consider it. That went on for a long time, until February of 2010, then Eli Roth started really being supportive because *Dead Hooker* was hugely inspired by the multi-collaborative *Grindhouse* and all of the directors involved in that, especially Jason Eisner's *Hobo with a Shotgun*. We were like, "*Holy crap! A Canadian dude? We should do something like that, something that's super outrageous and very attention-grabbing.*"

Jen: Robert Rodriguez was a huge influence as well. We read his book, *Rebel Without a Crew*, and at the end, it says to not talk about it - to go out and make your own movie. We're proudly failed actresses, so originally *Dead Hooker* was going to be a showcase to show how much we could do with acting as it was opposite the types we were usually cast as. But when we were writing and directing and dabbling with the other departments as well, I realised how much more we preferred filmmaking to acting. When you're an actor, you're just kind of begging to work and chasing after roles that necessarily you don't want to play, you just want to be working. When directing, you can create the entire world, you can create something out of nothing and then watch it come to life – it's like being God, it's the most amazing feeling in the world.



Sylvia: And through the promotion of *Dead Hooker* – Jen and I used to work as promotional girls, people would hire identical twins to promote different products – so we pushed that fucker hard. We tried to get everybody to watch it. If someone watched it we would thank them. Even if they wrote a shitty review, we'd be like, "*Thank you for at least even watching it and telling people about it.*" It kept snowballing from there.

Jen: I still can't believe that people have seen *Dead Hooker* and liked it!

Sylvia: Or any of our films! Any time someone says "*I just saw American Mary*" or "*I just got my copy of Dead Hooker*", I'm like, "*Seriously, that's so cool. Thank you!*"

So are you surprised at how well people responded to the film?

Sylvia: Yeah, hugely. I hoped people would like it, but they *really*, *really* liked it. Or they really hated it! What we do, there's usually no medium ground; you either choose to unabashedly adore it or you hate it - and us - with a furious passion.

Jen: The only middle ground is, "*No, I haven't heard of the Soska sisters yet.*" It's either I wanna marry them and keep them in a dungeon or I wanna murder them slowly in front of their family.

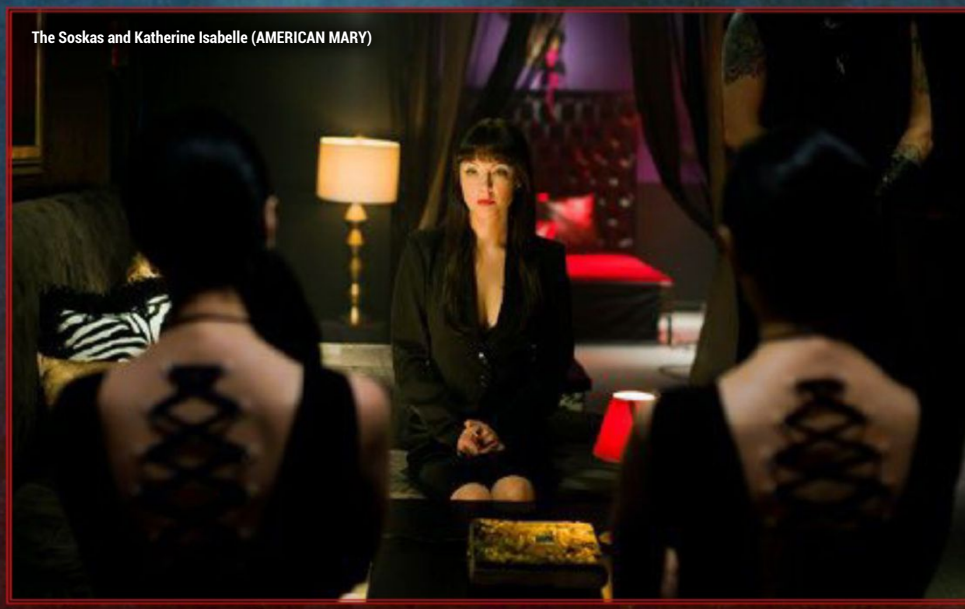
And you followed *Dead Hooker* with *American Mary*, which was again hugely well received by horror fans. Where did the idea for that come from?

Sylvia: We heard about body modification as an April fools prank on a website where they had two identical brothers that they made up that they swapped limbs. One ended up with three arms and one ended up with the other brother's finger grafted on to his finger. It really stuck with me because you had to be an identical twin to understand why you would do this. My mom always taught me that if something frightens you then it's just a lack of education, so learn more about it and you won't be scared anymore. Then when we were struggling to sell *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, I was having a conversation with Eli Roth and he was, like, "*Don't focus just on this, focus on your next movie. What's your next movie gonna be? Send me the script.*" I didn't have anything so I just decided to lie and said, "*Pick which script! I have this monster movie, I have this one about this, one about this medical student and body modification, I have this other one...*" And he said, "*The medical student one.*" I was all like, "*Okay, well I'd be super embarrassed if there were any mistakes in that, so give me two weeks and I'll send it over to you.*" Then I looked at Jen and I was, like, "*Fuck! I just promised we had a script. I need to write it in two weeks with you!*"

Jen: The film ended up being super therapeutic; it's very much an analogy for our own struggles in the film industry, trying to be accepted at the same level of many of our male peers, mostly producers, not so much directors. They

Katherine Isabelle as Mary, and Tristran Risk as Beatress

The Twins being operated on (AMERICAN MARY)


The Soskas and Katherine Isabelle (AMERICAN MARY)

say it's a boys club, but a director is a director no matter how you splice it. It's just some old school dinosaur producers who like to exert their power over people who might not know so much and who are really, really, desperate to succeed. Our grandmother was terminally ill at the time, too, and she's since passed, but that all came into the film. It was about a connection, also about finding kinship with fellow outsiders. There was a lot of pressure for us to make *American Mary* more generic for everybody, but it has to be for the fucked-up people like us.

Sylvia: And I think the time constraint really made it more honest. If I'd have thought about it, I don't think we would've wanted our personal life so out there. It turned out working very well, and we were huge fans of Katharine Isabelle so we wrote the role for her. It was just something we wanted to see her do. She's so beautiful, people forget she's a magnificent actress.

Jen: The film hit such a personal note for so many people. We get so many e-mails, and have people coming over to say they were raped and *American Mary* gave them the strength to get over it, that they're not going to be a victim because of that horrible thing that was done to them. And that's just the greatest thing in the world. I can't even put to words what that means, as a filmmaker, to have that kind of reaction.

In terms of onscreen talent, the horror genre often sees women portrayed as the victim, as the 'final girl' or the 'scream queen.' How do you find people react to you as being serious writers and directors in the genre, and are you now just seen as 'one of the guys'?

Sylvia: I don't think I'm one of the guys! Hanging out at Fantastic Fest with all the other directors there, it's amazing. People are very excited to see women directors because they don't understand why there aren't more of them. It's been at an all-time low in the last 40 years, women directing. It's just shocking in this day and age. You have a whole piece of the population and you're not getting their stories, you're not hearing their voice. Once in a while, I run into somebody really stupid who'll be, like, "*How can you make a horror movie because you're a girl?*" I'm like, "*You're right, I should just go to the kitchen.*"

Jen: Or an action movie. We just finished our first action movie, *Vendetta*, and somebody asked how we could direct an action movie when we're girls. It's the most stupid thing in the world. How are you supposed to make a comedy if you're a man? How are you supposed to know what's funny? It's insane! There's always some people that are just not going to like us just for whatever reason. We weren't popular in high school. Life is like high school, it just extends from there. Anyone who says it's any different when you get out is just wrong.

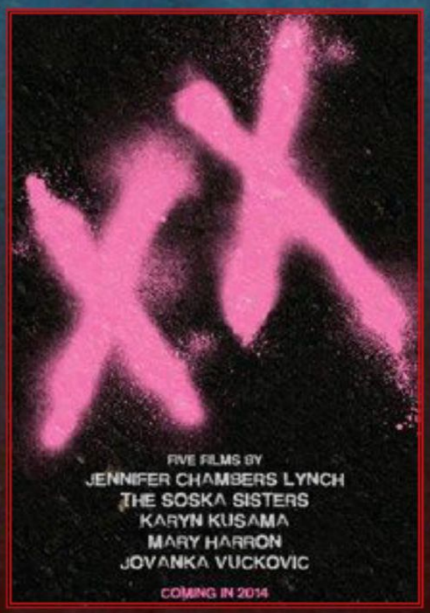
Sylvia: I wanna think about what Mary Harron did. She could've easily been like, "*Fuck off, you're wrong.*" Instead she decided to be educational. So any time I run into someone who's misinformed, no matter how stupid their comments are, I try to be like "*Well that's an interesting point, but we know what we're doing. Yes, we've done this. Yes, I'm aware of that. Thank you.*"

And you ended up getting invited to work on *The ABCs of Death 2*. How cool was it to have that come along?

Jen: It's such a profound honour. We met Ant Timpson [producer of *The ABCs of Death* movies] two years ago at Fantastic Fest when we were promoting *American Mary* and it had its American premiere there. He said that he never even thought that we'd want to do *ABCs*, that if they

Tristan Risk in ABC'S OF DEATH: T IS FOR TORTURE PORN

On set of VENDETTA



do another one would we be interested. Are you kidding? Yes! But we didn't expect anything to come from it – if you've been to Fantastic Fest, there's a lot of drinking going round - to be included in *ABCs of Death*; really, it's a showcase for a whole bunch of directors and for the top directors in the genre working across the globe.

Sylvia: The nice thing is, they were super supportive. It's so funny, because I thought the MDA was going to freak out. I thought what we'd done was very vile and disgusting. Even then, our producers were like "*Do you wanna make it more so?*"

Jen: It was so creatively liberating, too. They just say here's your money, here's your letter, you can put in more money if you want, just don't fuck it up, good luck, do whatever you want.

What can you tell us about your segment?

Sylvia: Our letter is T, which is for torture porn. It's a commentary on the most violent, graphic, sexual violence against women with a very hentai, Asian twist at the end.

Jen: It's a commentary about the objectification and gratuitous sexualisation of women in horror. We kind of flipped the tables on it. The first part of it, I'd say, is the real horror movie. Then the rest of it is just fun.

Sylvia: Yeah, it's awesome. We team up again with Tristan Risk from *American Mary*, and she's one of my favourite actresses. So few actresses can really take a performance with so many prosthetics and still elevate it, and still make that part of their whole body movement.

Jen: We also got the after the credits scene, which was second unit directed by another awesome female director, Jill Sixx Gevargizian, so stay tuned after the credits.

You touched on *Vendetta* earlier. What can you tell us about that and about the all-female *XX* that you have coming up?

Sylvia: *Vendetta* is starring Dean Cain and [WWE Superstar] The Big Show and Michael Eklund. If you were to tell me two weeks before we went into production that Dean Cain is the baddest motherfucker I'll ever work with, I probably would've laughed.

Jen: You've never seen Dean Cain like this. This is basically our 'Punisher versus The Kingpin' story.

Sylvia: It's funny, because in horror movies you murder people. In an action movie, it's genocide. It's so much murder!

Jen: He goes to prison after the guy who kills his wife. It's just bloody and violent and dark and sinister. It's a descent into him just losing it; going from a really great cop to a badass motherfucker.

Sylvia: And *XX* is an all-female anthology. We actually get to work with our hero, Mary Harron, who wrote the book of it, and Jennifer Lynch, Sofia Carrillo, and Karyn Kusama. It's so funny, a lot of people said that it was very sexist. I think that's as much as I can say without getting in any trouble.

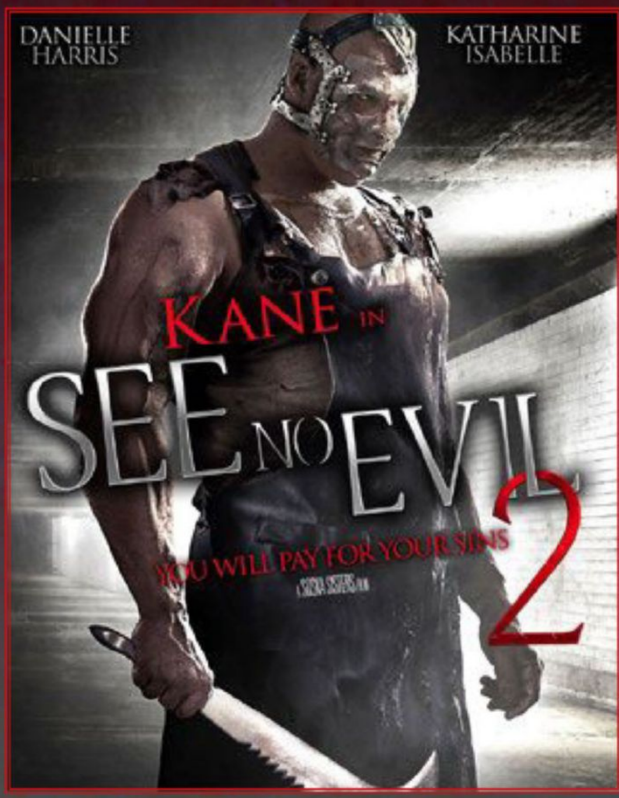
There's been talk of you guys handling a *Painkiller Jane* adaptation at some point. Is that something that might be happening or is it all hush-hush on that front?

Sylvia: It's a bit hush-hush. The thing is, we're finding Jane right now.

Jen: It's tough because we don't want a delicate Jane, we want a badass Jane; the kind of Jane that if you spilt her beer then you'd put money down on the bar and just leave.

Sylvia: You know how Chris Pratt had that huge transformation? [For the role of Peter Quill in *Guardians of the Galaxy*] This Jane has to be buff and muscular, and even more terrifying before she even gets her superpowers. The script written by Jimmy Palmiotti, who was the co-creator of the character, and Craig Weeden is like *The Heat* on crack – the most absurd, humorous, crass, amazing violence that still somehow manages to have a lot of heart to it. Also, there might be another movie that we're going to sneak in before the end of the year that's going to be announced very soon.

SEE NO EVIL 2 is out now on DVD, with THE ABCS OF DEATH 2 currently awaiting a confirmed UK release date.



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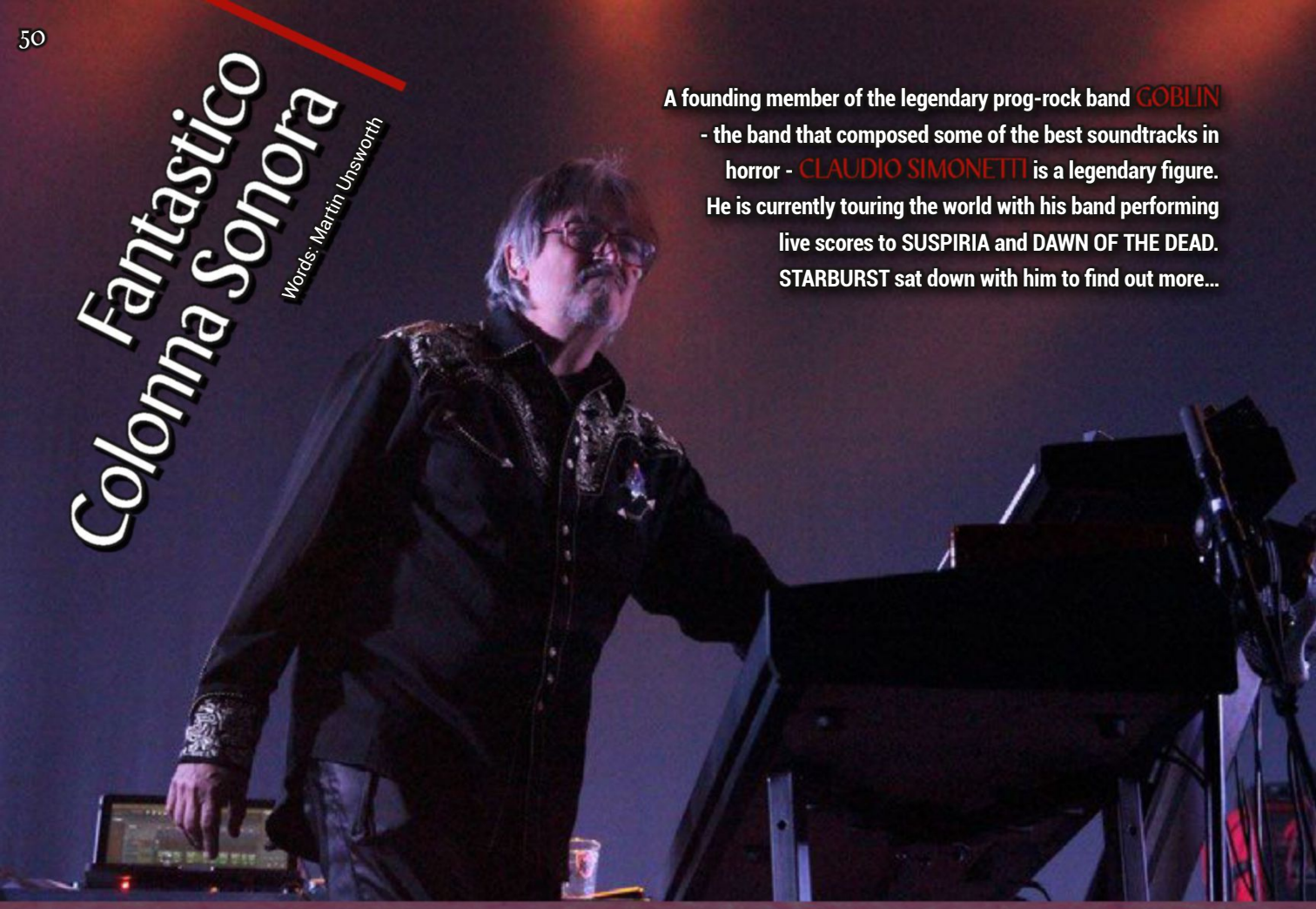
Fantastico Colonna Sonora

Words: Martin Unsworth

A founding member of the legendary prog-rock band GOBLIN - the band that composed some of the best soundtracks in horror - CLAUDIO SIMONETTI is a legendary figure. He is currently touring the world with his band performing live scores to SUSPIRIA and DAWN OF THE DEAD. STARBURST sat down with him to find out more...



STARBURST: How did you get started composing soundtracks?
Claudio Simonetti: It was just fortune. In the early '70s, I had many bands; one of them was the earlier Goblin; me and the guitar player Massimo Morante recorded some demos and decided to build a band around them. We lived in London for a while in 1974, and when we came back to Italy we signed a contract with Cinevox Records. They were also soundtrack publishers, including Dario Argento's films. Dario had finished *Profondo rosso* (*Deep Red*), his fifth film; he wanted a rock band to have a modern sound for his film. He asked for Deep Purple, Pink Floyd, King Crimson, Emerson Lake and Palmer – he's a big fan of Keith Emerson, he worked with him in 1979 on *Inferno* – the producer told him, '*Before you choose these big bands, why don't you listen to this band I'm producing in Rome*'. Dario came in the studio where we were recording the album; the name of the band at this point wasn't Goblin, it was Oliver – Dario loved our music and said OK. Our music was good for this kind of film.

Did Dario give you any input into the sound of what he wanted?
Of course, before we started, we talked a lot about that. We listened to a lot of records and music for more or less the sound he wanted for the film.

How did you get started doing the live soundtrack concerts?
It's a great idea! The first time we did it was in 2009 with *Profondo rosso*, in Torino, Italy with another band, Daemonia. It was incredible; we played in the same square where he shot the film. It's very big, 10,000 people sitting on the floor watching the film. The second time was with New Goblin, we played *Suspiria* in Australia and New Zealand. Then after New Goblin split – Goblin is like an estranged family, all divorced - I started to play with my current band as Claudio Simonetti's Goblin and we played *Suspiria* in Ireland and England.

Would you prefer to carry that on, or do you prefer to do your own live show?
Oh yes, but this is a different kind of show. Of course, I prefer to play a concert, because I play for up to two hours doing many themes. I can play different kinds of music, including my own music. With a film we have to play exactly in time.

Is that difficult?
Yes, a little bit. We are helped by earpieces and computers, but it's very hard to play exactly with the same synch as the film.

What's your favourite piece to play live?
Maybe *Profondo rosso*. *Suspiria* is the most interesting music, it's Goblin's masterpiece. The real Goblin sound is in *Suspiria*, but there's a lot of atmosphere. For playing live, I love to play *Dawn of the Dead* because we play rock and more... every piece is different. With *Suspiria*, It's quite the same style for the whole film.

Are there any directors you'd like to do a score for?
There are lot of good new directors! I see a lot of films now, but don't really know the directors; the quality now is very high. But not for the music. I don't know what's happening any more, because no one cares about the music. It's the same stuff; boring stuff – Hollywood style.

Nothing happens. I was very disappointed by the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* – the film is great, I love it - the director did a good job, normally the remakes are bad, but not this one. But no one remembers the music – Goblin's missing there! So yeah, I'd like to work with some of these new directors. Of course I'd work with Carpenter or people like him, but to do something different for these films. They are clichéd. Bernard Herrmann was a genius, you can't forget *Psycho* – now you don't have the music scaring you unless it's just loud jump sounds.

Any more plans to bring the band back to the UK?

I'm not sure if there will be concerts here, but we will maybe do films, maybe both. When we started Goblin, we lived in London, we arrived from Italy trying to do the prog-rock of the '70s, and there were so many bands. We thought we weren't good enough for the English market. We were very big fans of bands like Genesis, Gentle Giant; so we went back to Italy and were lucky. It's weird after all these years to be back in England with the shows. England is the country where this music was born. The English bands of the '70s are the best. Nothing can compare.

If you could be a member of any other band who would it be?

The Beatles! [laughs] But they never had a keyboard player. It's a good question; I've never asked myself that. One of my favourite bands is Genesis; I love the first three albums. In 2011, we played a concert in Rome with New Goblin. Lots of famous Italian prog bands played this festival, and every band had one special guest. When the organiser told me Steve Hackett would be playing with us, it was incredible! It was my dream! We played *Watcher of the Skies*, when I played the Mellotron, I wanted to cry. Steve Hackett was looking at me – and I'd grown up with his music! He played the solo on *Profondo rosso* with us as well.

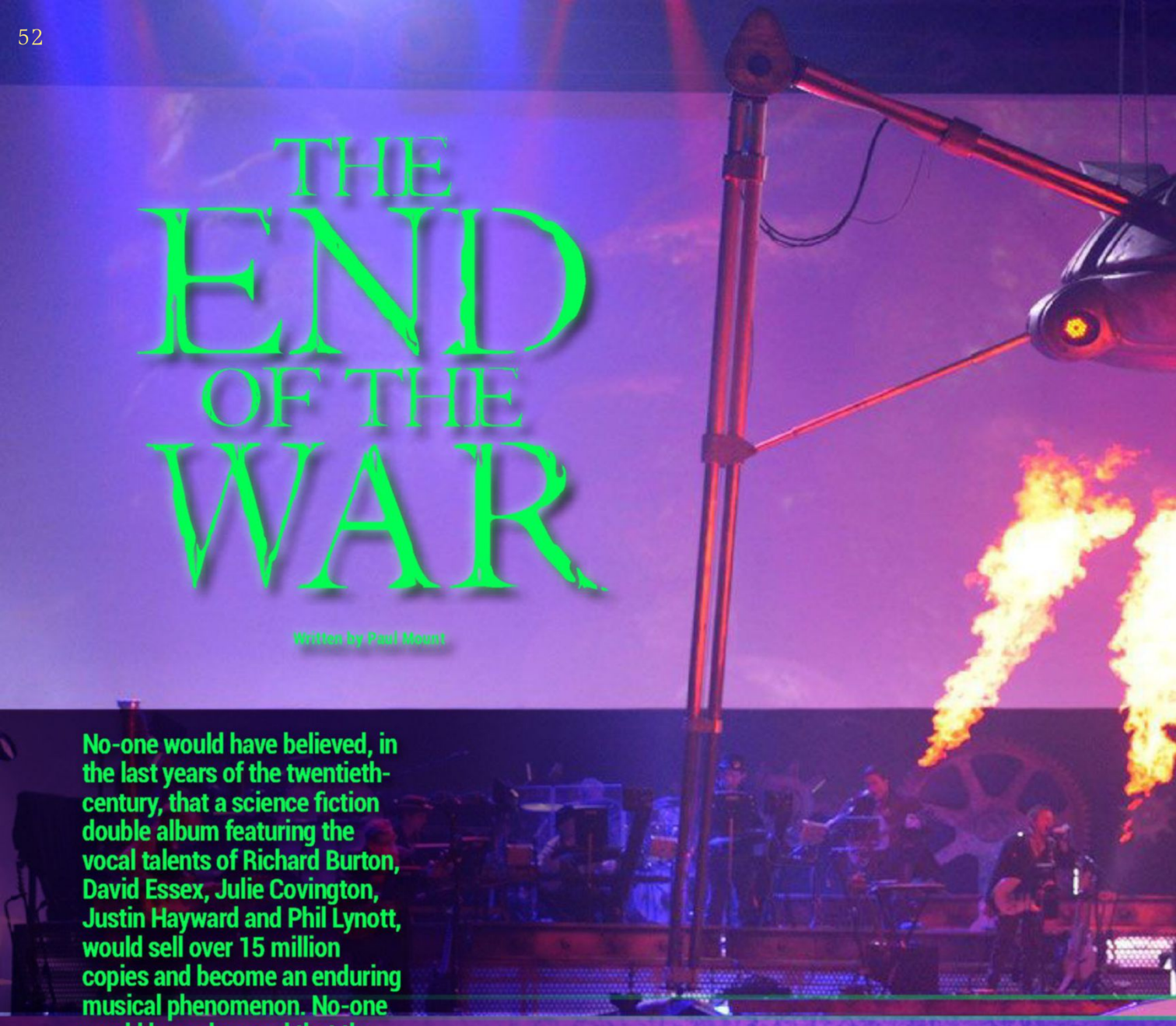
Will there be any new recordings with the band?

We are starting to do a new album with new songs, yes. But next year we will do gigs for the 40th anniversary of *Profondo rosso*. We will do something special; a record for *Profondo rosso* also.

CLAUDIO SIMONETTI'S GOBLIN comprises of Claudio Simonetti – keyboards, Bruno Previtali – guitars Federico Amorosi – bass and Titta Tani – drums. They will be providing the soundtrack to the next DARIO ARGENTO film, THE SANDMAN, starring Iggy Pop, which begins shooting soon and is expected to be released in 2015.

THE END OF THE WAR

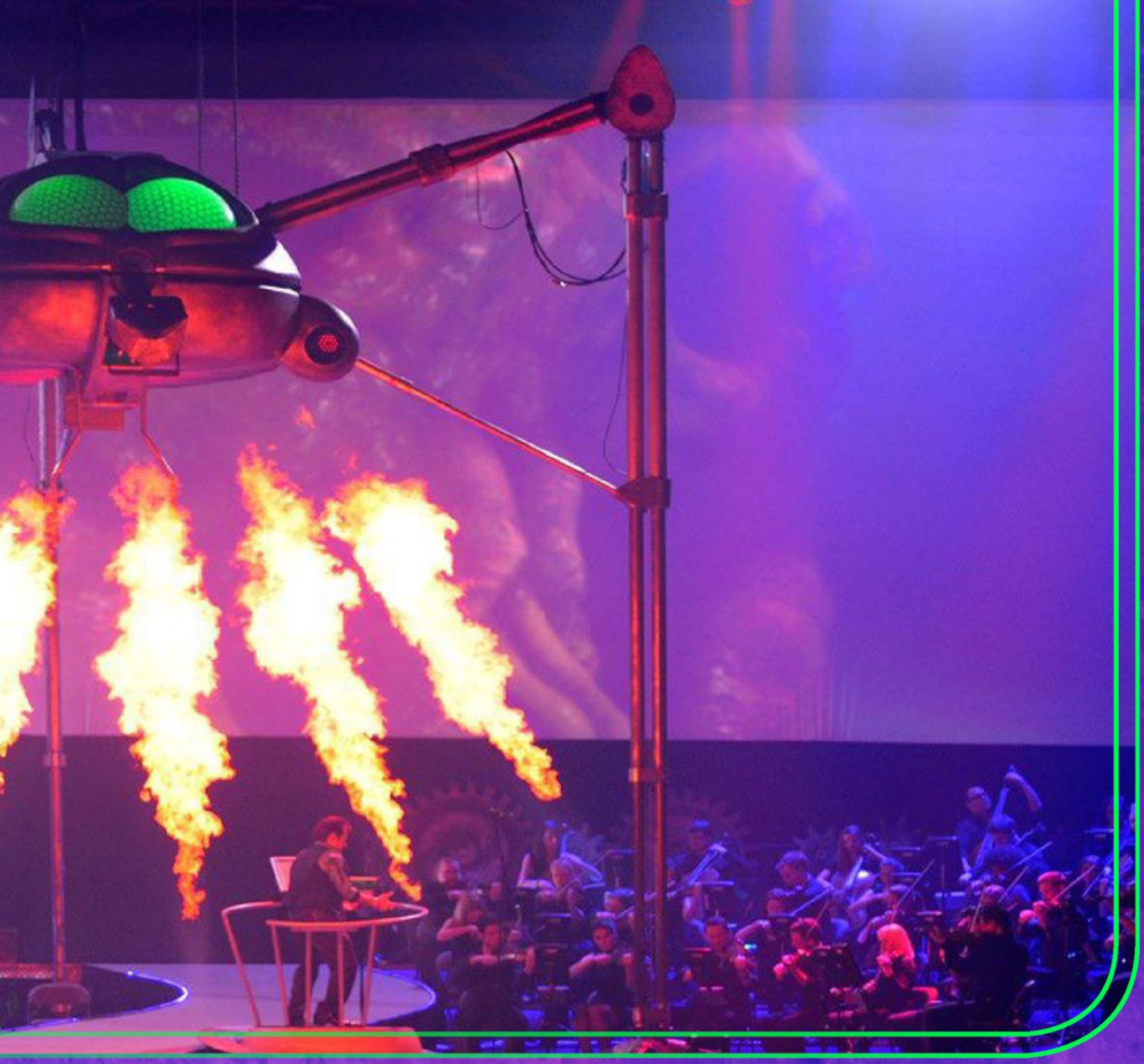
Written by Paul Mount



No-one would have believed, in the last years of the twentieth-century, that a science fiction double album featuring the vocal talents of Richard Burton, David Essex, Julie Covington, Justin Hayward and Phil Lynott, would sell over 15 million copies and become an enduring musical phenomenon. No-one would have dreamed that the show would finally take to the stage in 2006, combining state of-the-art special effects and visual trickery to create an enthralling, immersive and unforgettable live experience. As the musical version of HG WELLS' WAR OF THE WORLDS sets out on its final ever arena tour, STARBURST talks to its creator, musical genius JEFF WAYNE - a mind immeasurably superior to ours - about his masterpiece and about life after the war...

STARBURST: When you were working on the original *War of the Worlds* album, could you ever have imagined - even in your wildest dreams - just how popular and successful it would become?
Jeff Wayne: In truth, absolutely not. In fact, if you'd asked me before it even came out how I thought it'd do the honest answer would be that I didn't even know if it was going to be released! I had to complete the largest part of it with my own money. I had a contract with CBS which gave them thirty days once it was finished to have a listen to make a decision whether they even liked it before they would release it. After the thirty days expired, I got a call asking if they could have another thirty days so it was on a sort of knife's edge. The second thirty days passed and they came back unanimously saying, '*you've done something rather special here, we're gonna give it a big worldwide release*' and then I knew it was coming out for sure. Once it came out, it took off all over the world and it wasn't just the original double album; we had singles which enjoyed commercial success and we had what they called 'disco mixes' in those days. I was suddenly aware that what we'd spent all that time working on was resonating with critics, audiences, the pop world – everybody. Then I knew I'd reached people but I wouldn't have been able to tell all these years later that we'd be speaking today about the life it's had, not in a million years.

So what's the continuing appeal of the project, do you think? Is it the unique combination of the original powerful story, the characters and the music?
I think that's exactly it. I think HG Wells created this very special tale of a Martian invasion in Victorian England. It had a terror about it, but it also had a lot of accurate science and maths and



ideas that, in today's world, when you look at the world we live in, are all in *War of the Worlds*, whether it's about invasion, whether it's about one's faith, or challenging one's faith in another. This is what attracted me to *War of the Worlds*; Wells was taking a pop at the expanding British Empire under Queen Victoria and he felt that was wrong, just as it would be wrong for any Empire or nation to go up against another nation. Those are the things that attracted me and obviously have attracted millions of people all over the world. I like to think I got the right feeling in my score and compositions and the script that was adapted, the lyrics that were written and, of course, I was very lucky to work with a cast of characters who gave it their own magic. I guess that music is also one of those common denominators pretty much around the world, so if you can reach people through music it can have a lasting effect.

When making the original recordings, Britain was in the middle of a significant musical revolution in the form of punk and new wave; angry young men and women were picking up their guitars and vocalising their discontent in punchy three-minute pop songs. Did you ever worry that you were making something anachronistic which might be dismissed as irrelevant and out-of-step with what was happening musically?
Absolutely! But I was a young musician and I was very conscious of what was going on with disco music, and I knew about the angst in punk and related areas of music but actually I had the same angst. I was just expressing it in around a hundred minutes rather than three minutes. I very much knew that I wanted to say; what I was feeling built around the story. But yes, it fit no format whatsoever; continuous play, not even songs that were necessarily completed - you heard a half or three-quarters of a song or a tune and then suddenly it'd disappear into another theme, or another section of the story emerges and then the song or the theme comes back later on or gets turned upside down or inside out. But that's what came out of me, that's what I wanted to say, that was my angst, if you like. I had a blank page to say it on and I took every opportunity to, I hope, come up with something which was honest and conveyed how I felt, and it reached an audience.

Did you always envisage the album eventually becoming a live stage show?
My Dad and I were partners in *War of the Worlds* and he was a singer/actor/writer and he did a lot, in his heyday, as a performer. He did a number of Broadway shows and when I moved to England with my parents as a little boy he was in a West End musical which had transferred from Broadway. So years later when we did

War of the Worlds, where our heads were was probably more related to concert halls or West End/Broadway type of theatre venues, because arenas weren't being used as they are now. The scale and size of a production to fill an arena is immense, as I've discovered in these last eight years and the technology wasn't really sophisticated enough to do what we've been doing since 2006. Even now, every production we do tops the previous one and in the blink of an eye something new comes along technologically and you consider it and see whether it can fit into your production, so it's sort of like a living work.

And that, presumably, is what brings the audiences back; they want to see how the show has changed and moved on?
Well I hope so! I've been very conscious of that, it'd be far easier and much more profitable to take it out of the box and do it the same way each time, but that's just not the way I've ever seen it. I do think people have come back, or spread the word to encourage people to come to it for the first time, because they know it keeps growing and I like to think we give great value for the price of the ticket. I'm very sensitive to how much tickets cost these days.

What can fans expect from this latest tour?
It's grown substantially yet again, in a range of ways. On a technological level, we have some new effects and illusions; we've extended the 3D holography where we see Liam Neeson on stage. I've written a new song which is going to be debuted which I'm very excited about and we're also bringing HG Wells himself to life between the age of thirty-three and seventy-nine, and giving him a chance to have his say. He's live on stage played by Callum O'Neill. We met quite a number of actors, some very well-known and some entirely unknown, but Callum just hit the nail on the head in his ability to act as HG, and transform in age and convince us, from the script that's been written, that he's Wells. It's gone through a long evolution; we've worked with people who do special effects, prosthetics, wigs, skin transformations, everything that can take a person from looking from one age to another. They've done big movies, from the *Harry Potter* movies to TV series, so we were in great hands and it's really very convincing. We see movies and TV full of amazing characterizations of all sorts and ageing processes but when you're filming you can take as long as you want until it's ready but what our team had to create was for a live performance. There are three major pieces that HG does and there's a finite amount of time that the physical transformation has; it's all very clever stuff and it really convinces the audience that this ageing man is always the same person. I was very fortunate to work with the skill level of the people who came on board and were attracted to give it a go.

Jeff Wayne

The original album has evolved over the years, too, of course. It's been remixed and reissued, recorded with an entirely new cast for the 'new generation' edition in 2010, and the stage experience is constantly changing. Is it this organic aspect of the project which keeps it fresh for you?
Exactly. Emotionally it was hard to leave behind Richard Burton and his performance, considering how many years he was with us - he's still on the original recording - and the technology of recreating him for the first five tours and taking him around the world. It wasn't an easy separation but the only way I could expand the story was to accept the fact that our main character, the one 'acting' role, had to be explored from a script point of view. Richard had seventy-four sequences which he did on the album as well as when we brought his performance to life, whereas Liam Neeson, a living actor who we spent two weeks with in New York recording and filming, has ninety sequences. Just as a statistic, it gives you an idea of the sort of scale of the expanded story which means that every other element, from my score to special effects to animation, you name it, has grown in proportion as well. Today's production is up to two and a quarter hours, whereas when we started we were at a hundred or a hundred-and-five minutes.

How did you manage to get Liam Neeson on board for the 'new generation' and what does he bring to the role of the narrator, the Journalist?
He is his own man. When I met him in New York he told me that he bought the album when it first came out and his only hesitancy was when he said, '*You're asking me to follow Richard Burton?*' and I told him, '*I just want you to be Liam Neeson, you're a pretty darned good actor*'. He has his own very mellifluous quality in his voice. He speaks quieter than Richard, but he fills the spectrum on a microphone in quite a magnificent way. I explained the background to the expanded story with ninety sequences, so it was going to require his own interpretation of the role anyway and that I'd be behind the window giving him feedback as he evolved the role of the Journalist. So he said '*All right, give me a few days to think about it*'. We came back home to where I live in Shenley in Hertfordshire, and a few days later we got a call and he was on board. So in my world, I struck gold twice with the two Journalists I've had. I always remember when Liam said he was concerned about

Liam Neeson hologram

following Richard he said, '*it's the demons*' and I remember thinking, '*What does he mean by that? I know he's Irish, maybe it's something in the Irish tradition*'. He could see my mind ticking over and he said, '*No, what I mean is, I'm being asked to follow Richard, and you might not know this but when I was breaking through one of the first jobs I had was in a TV mini-series and Richard was the star and I was the new kid on the block, and although I didn't do any scenes with him I used to watch him work.*' Richard obviously had an influence on his acting so I hit him with something I hadn't realised when I was asking him to follow on from someone whose work he had admired, and *that* was his demon. But after that, he was so receptive and he was a gentleman and a delight to work with.

We understand that the Journalist enjoys a bit more interactivity in this new production?
We see the journalist in three different ways. He's in certain film sequences up on our big screen, but there's a 3D holographic screen that hovers over the stage and you see him almost entirely in head and shoulders - occasionally he has some props like glasses and other bits and pieces but he's recounting his story of his survival of this Martian invasion six years earlier. But when he's in real-time - when all the other live artists are performing - there's another screen where he's full-body and he's actually interacting with the other characters on stage. There's even a couple of tricks such as the first scene where he meets the Artilleryman who has crawled into the Journalist's house thinking it's unoccupied. He's just experienced, along with the rest of his regiment on Horsell Common in Surrey, the first cylinder that's landed and the Martians have started coming out with their heat rays and other weaponry. He's survived this first attack and he's dishevelled, bloodied, trying to get some shelter but it turns out it's the house of the Journalist who's very much at home. He takes pity on the Artilleryman and he offers him a drink and you see him from the

holographic screen hand him the drink and the Artilleryman takes it and says 'Thanks'. We have a few tricks like that, including a new one which is being tested as we speak and if it works we hope it's another one that'll be going in, another '*wow*' moment!

This is billed as the 'final' arena tour. Why have you decided to call time on such a popular and beloved show?
Well, there's a reason for it which, until early to mid-next year, I can't yet announce but I've entered into an arrangement to do something new with *War of the Worlds* which is very exciting. It's a new direction and if it works it'll be yet another brand to the story that it's never had before. The media world has changed, as you know, with digital technology, the internet - there's so many different ways to reach people; there's always something different you can be doing. But I have other interests that I'm hoping to also have some time to do. It's interesting that since between the album's first release in 1978 and 2005 , other than some computer games I was involved with for DVD and PlayStation and club remixes and collector's editions and so on, I did anything but *War Of The Worlds* in all those years. So it was totally fresh when I came back to it for the tour and I was looking at it with new eyes and ears, testing my own work to see if it was something I'd want to perform, and if I'd want to perform it in precisely the way it existed or if I wanted to, as I originally thought, see it sort of as a living work and that's what convinced me that it was and why every production we've done gets supersized.

Were you ever tempted to follow up *War of the Worlds* with another science fiction project, possibly another one of Wells' classics?
I actually did another musical based on the true story called *Spartacus*, and I was fortunate to work with Anthony Hopkins, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and a range of other wonderful musicians and performers. It did well, but not as well as *War of the Worlds*, and it's one of the things I want to revisit, particularly as live entertainment. Funnily enough, the publisher of most of HG's original works, after *War of the Worlds* came out, sent me first editions of just about everything Wells had written and said, '*Do you fancy doing any other of HG's works?*' I didn't want to turn it into a format and I didn't want to become known just for doing science fiction pieces, and I'm not sure I'd have fallen in love with anything else the way I did *War of the Worlds*. I think it had something very definite to say and it reached me.

How do you think you'll feel at the very end of the very last night of the tour?
Mixed emotions; conducting one's own work, as a musician, is pretty special. I'm excited about where it's heading but it's not going to be me conducting on a podium on this particular new direction. I wish the show was ending in London [*the final show is in Amsterdam on December 16th*] so it might even be a bit anticlimactic, but it'll be emotional for me for sure. The performance itself is the best thing about it. I've been to many countries as far away as Australia and New Zealand, and seen countries and parts of countries I've not visited before. Knowing the reception it's had has been the most rewarding part of it.

Are you happy to be defined by *War of the Worlds* and the fact that it's your legacy?
I'm very contended with that indeed. I

look at people whose work I admire - not necessarily just music - but anyone with an idea which contributes something important to the world, and if that's all that they're remembered for. Well, that's enough, they've done something that's going to be left behind as a legacy. If I ever reach that stature with *War of the Worlds*, then I hope my family will be proud of that. I'm proud of what I created, proud of the people I worked with and thrilled that it's had a life so far of thirty-six years and counting. I never predicted that.

The Final Arena Tour of JEFF WAYNE'S THE MUSICAL VERSION OF WAR OF THE WORLDS begins on November 27th at the Dublin 02 Arena and runs until December 15th in the UK. Check out ***thewaroftheworlds.com/tickets*** *for further information about other venues and ticket availability.*

To Galaxies Far, Far Away

by Kieron Moore

After taking us through the murky streets of Gotham City and deep into the human mind, CHRISTOPHER NOLAN's next stop, INTERSTELLAR: to infinity and beyond...

"We shall one day travel to the moon, the planets, and the stars, with the same facility, rapidity, and certainty as we now make the voyage from Liverpool to New York" predicted Jules Verne in 1865's *From the Earth to the Moon*, one of many science fiction visionaries to approach the human race's expansion into the great beyond, a topic later touched upon by Wells, Bradbury, Roddenberry, Kubrick, and many more. It's a narrative that has been shaped by increasing concern for our natural resources – we no longer tell stories of the human race going into space out of prosperity, rather out of necessity. And this is the angle of the latest great storyteller to approach the subject – Christopher Nolan, with his upcoming epic *Interstellar*.

It's a natural progression for Nolan, whose *Memento* and *Dark Knight* trilogy established him as a director with a unique and thoughtful take on genre material. He then took us on a journey inside the land of dreams with 2010's acclaimed *Inception*, a complex sci-fi thriller with a few conventions borrowed from the heist genre. Though it looked inward into the human mind, it was a film of vast imagery; indeed, each of Nolan's films has upped the scale of its predecessor, so where else to venture for his next outing but the final frontier?

Interstellar didn't originate with Nolan, though. After collaborating on 1997's *Contact*, theoretical physicist Kip Thorne and producer Lynda Obst drew up a movie idea based on Thorne's research into space travel via wormholes. Thorne's treatment got the attention of Steven Spielberg, who jumped aboard to direct, and hired Jonathan Nolan in 2007 to write the script. When Spielberg departed the project in early 2013, Jonathan's brother Chris took up the reins and added his own ideas. With a new script and an A-list cast, *Interstellar* went into production late last year.

Space Oddities

Film trailers these days often give away far too much plot, but *Interstellar*'s are quite the opposite, offering us little more than pretty shots of corn fields and Michael Caine reciting *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*. So let's barge non-gently into the pile of hints we do have in an attempt to make sense of it all (if you want to go into the cinema entirely unspoiled, you may want to skip this section).

In the near future, Earth's crop supplies are running low due to climate change, rendering the planet uninhabitable. Seeing the only chance for humanity's survival is in the stars, Professor Michael Caine gets together a crack team of astronauts and launches the Lazarus mission, a grandiose space exploration project with the aim of travelling through wormholes and finding new worlds on which to settle.

Matthew McConaughey leads the cast as Cooper, a trained pilot and engineer recruited to be one of the pioneers. Like *Inception*'s Dom Cobb, Cooper is a widower, and the trailers hint that a large part of his emotional story is the decision to leave his children behind in favour of a chance to save the entire race – "*I'm thinking about my family and millions of other families*", he boldly determines. Though previously typecast for leaning on things in the posters for shoddy romantic comedies, McConaughey's had something of a career rebirth in the past few years. Nolan spotted his talent in an early screening of Jeff Nichol's indie drama *Mud* and immediately wanted him on board – a decision vindicated now that the star's bagged himself an Oscar for last year's *Dallas Buyers Club*.

Cooper's joined on his mission by Anne Hathaway's Amelia Brand, the team's socially awkward biologist – a role very different to the playful Selina Kyle whom Hathaway played in *The Dark Knight Rises*, the last time she worked with Nolan. David Gyasi, who also appeared in *The Dark Knight Rises* as 'Skinny Prisoner', is cast as Romilly (obviously he impressed Nolan, as his character gets a name this time), as is *The Hunger Games*' Wes Bentley, who plays Doyle.

But no space crew is complete without a couple of robots. CASE and TARS are *Interstellar*'s answer to R2-D2 and C-3PO, though rather than anything anthropomorphic, these guys are futuristic extrapolations of current military technology, and are shaped like black rectangles (the *2001* similarity is intentional) that fold out into different shapes. They're a very different design to any robots seen in sci-fi before, and so aren't easy to describe – but look carefully in the trailer to get a glimpse of one in action, folded out into four big fingers and rolling along an alien landscape. Both were operated on set by Bill Irwin, who also provides the voice for TARS.

These robots are just part of the fascinating collection of technology employed by the Lazarus team. The Mothership of the mission is the Endurance, a big-ass rocket with design similarities to the International Space

Station. It's emblematic of *Interstellar*'s rough and dusty approach to sci-fi – not a sleek *Enterprise*-like ship controlled by waving hands through holograms and shouting at computers, but a more tangible, believable spaceship with knobs and joysticks and things that would probably snap off if you messed around with them too much. There's no beaming down to planets, either; the Endurance houses two smaller ships – the Lander, which ferries equipment down to ground, and the Ranger, a smaller, more agile shuttle used for exploring pastures new (which just happens to look a bit like James Bond's Lotus Esprit).

And these ships end up taking Cooper and co. to an exotic range of visually distinct planets, all with their own challenges and threats. So far, we've seen glimpses of a lagoon world, swamped with violent seas, and an icy mountain range with another lot of mountains hanging inverted above it. For both of these, the crew headed to Iceland, which Nolan last visited for Ra's al Ghul's hideout in *Batman Begins*, and there are likely to be more weird and wonderful places yet to be seen.

But, while team Lazarus progress on their trek through the stars, we'll also be returning to check up on planet Earth. There've been a lot of rumours about the identity of Jessica Chastain's character, but it seems she'll be playing a grown up version of Cooper's daughter, Murph. The astronaut may have promised a young Murph he'd be coming back, but, due to the time-bending aspect of the wormholes they're travelling in, a lot of time passes while he's away (it could be worse, they could have been overthrown by monkeys). Chastain's character has been seen with Casey Affleck's Tom, a character we know little about – but we speculate he may be Murph's brother.

ARE YOU WATCHING CLOSELY?

A look back over Christopher Nolan's stellar filmography...

FOLLOWING (1998)
A young writer follows people around London for inspiration. A noir-styled story about obsession and morally grey characters – which could describe any Nolan film, really.

MEMENTO (2000)
Guy Pearce tracks down his wife's killer, but due to severe amnesia can't retain any new information. We had to return our DVD as it was playing the scenes in the wrong order.

INSOMNIA (2002)
Investigating a murder in an small Alaskan town, sleep-deprived detective Al Pacino ends up playing psychological games against an unusually non-comical Robin Williams.

BATMAN BEGINS (2005)
Nolan brought a grittier tone to The Caped Crusader, a much-needed shift which wiped away any lingering memories of George Clooney's bat-nipples.

THE PRESTIGE (2006)
Complex Victorian thriller in which Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman are rival magicians, and David Bowie makes cats teleport.

THE DARK KNIGHT (2008)
Though tainted by Heath Ledger's tragic passing, this is the high point of Nolan's Bat-trilogy. The superhero genre meets *Heat*, with an unforgettably nasty Joker.

INCEPTION (2010)
Nolan used *The Dark Knight*'s success to fund this epic heist thriller in which Leonardo DiCaprio dives inside Cillian Murphy's mind. That sentence could have ended so differently.

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES (2012)
Bruce Wayne returns from retirement, the Occupy movement takes over Gotham, and everyone spends the summer doing impressions of Bane.

My god, it's full of stars.

The considerable cast also features John Lithgow, presumed to be Cooper's father, Topher Grace, David Oyelowo, and Matt Damon. Blimey. It's a big cast, and the film's of considerable length, too, clocking in at a bladder-straining 169 minutes, a whole four minutes longer than Nolan's previous record, *The Dark Knight Rises*. If you have to take a drink in, don't neck it down during the trailers...

It's an ambitious project, and Nolan's not one to do things by halves. This ambition's matched in *Interstellar*'s striving for realism. With Kip Thorne a constant presence on set and NASA regularly consulted, the science here is all based on what space travel could really be like not too far from now. It even has silence during exterior shots of spaceships – an element of realism that most space films reject in favour of 'pew pew' noises.

Nolan fans will know that he's a staunch defender of shooting on film over digital and of producing effects practically, and he's not let the increasing ubiquity of digital filmmaking technologies change any of that for *Interstellar*. Of course, there's some CGI, but he's remarkably eschewed the use of greenscreen for the spacefaring sequences, choosing instead to project digitally generated starscapes onto white backdrops so that the actors can see what their characters are looking at. It sounds unusual, but the old-fashioned methods may just result in more authentic performances.

A giant leap for Nolankind?

But what really matters is the story, I hear you cry. Will *Interstellar* keep your attention, or will you be drifting off by hour three? As ever, Nolan is tackling big themes, exploring our responsibility to protect our race, our planet, and, on a more emotional level, our family. He's named Kubrick's masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey* as one of *Interstellar*'s main inspirations, which is always a bold claim to make, but he also claims to have been influenced by the adventurous tones of Spielberg blockbusters like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Combining crowd-pleasing entertainment with an intellectual sensibility is Nolan's forte, and if any filmmaker today can combine these two antecedents and get away with it, it's Christopher Nolan. *Interstellar* might just exceed *Inception* as a unique, intelligent, and thoroughly enjoyable piece of science fiction.

You can make up your own mind when the Lazarus mission lands in cinemas on November 7th.

BY PAUL MOUNT

THE SUPERSTARS OF SUPERMARIONATION

FILMED IN SUPERMARIONATION, RELEASED THIS MONTH ON DVD AND BLU-RAY COURTESY OF NETWORK (AND REVIEWED LAST ISSUE), IS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE AND REVEALING DOCUMENTARY EVER MADE CHRONICLING THE WORK OF GERRY ANDERSON, CREATOR OF 1960S PUPPET ADVENTURE SERIES SUCH AS FIREBALL XL5, CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS, STINGRAY AND, MOST FAMOUSLY, THE UNFORGETTABLE THUNDERBIRDS. THE FILM IS ALSO AVAILABLE AS PART OF A SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S BOX SET WHICH INCLUDES REMASTERED HD EPISODES FROM THE ENTIRE ANDERSON SUPERMARIONATION CANON, NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN ARCHIVE FOOTAGE AND A WEALTH OF SPECIAL FEATURES WHICH REPRESENT THE DEFINITIVE CELEBRATION OF THE WORK OF THE MAN REGARDED BY MANY AS BRITAIN'S WALT DISNEY. BUT FILMED IN SUPERMARIONATION ISN'T JUST A HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GERRY ANDERSON; IT'S ALSO THE STORY OF A SMALL ARMY OF OFTEN-UNSUNG HEROES WHO WORKED TIRELESSLY TO MAKE GERRY'S FANTASTIC CREATIONS THE STUFF OF TV LEGEND. TOGETHER THEY'RE THE SUPERSTARS OF SUPERMARIONATION...

Drop the word 'Supermarionation' into a conversation with any relatively-savvy thirty or forty-something - or even more switched-on kids who've been introduced to the TV heroes their parents used to root for - and the response will probably be a fond smile, a twinkle in the eye and a murmuring of "*Ah, Gerry Anderson*." Supermarionation was the name coined by Gerry to describe the revolutionary methods developed to bring to the screen a succession of ageless classic science fiction-themed series which have thrilled and delighted generations of the young and young at heart alike. Super-marionette-animation - Supermarionation - gifted us **Fireball XL5**, **Stingray**, **Thunderbirds**, **Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons**, and **Joe 90** amongst others. Supermarionation may be synonymous with Gerry Anderson, but the shows the technique brought to life were, in reality, the result of countless hours of exhausting, frustrating, back-breaking work by teams of innovative behind-the-scenes craftsmen and women. Puppeteers, voice artists, model-makers and special effects technicians worked indefatigably at Gerry's Islet Park studios in Maidenhead, and later at facilities on the Slough Trading Estate, to realise the fruits of Gerry's formidable imagination. They made the impossible possible; they rose to every extraordinary challenge; they ripped up and then rewrote the rule book as they revolutionised the craft of making television.

It's nearly two years since Gerry Anderson passed away at the age of eighty-three. But this month, his legion of fans can immerse themselves once again in his incredible legacy courtesy of the enthralling two-hour documentary **Filmed in Supermarionation**, released as a standalone DVD/Blu-ray and also as part of a more lavish limited edition box set. The documentary recognises not only Gerry's place in the Supermarionation scheme of things, but also shines a long-overdue spotlight on the backroom talent who made it all happen. The whole project came about because of the ferocious passion and determination of two men; Tim Beddows, MD of Network Distributing, and the film's director, Stephen La Rivière, both devoted and lifelong fans of Gerry Anderson and his Supermarionation sensations.

"*The Supermarionation shows were a huge influence and inspiration when I was a kid*," recalls Stephen. "***Thunderbirds*** *has been in my life so long that I don't actually remember a time without it. It's a testament to how well the shows were made that I was watching them almost three decades after they were made, yet had no idea they were of another time.* ***Doctor Who****, which I also loved as a kid, always seemed old. The first episode of* ***Stingray*** *and the first episode of* ***Who*** *were in production at the same time - looking at them now you wouldn't guess they were from the same decade! As I grew up, I became increasingly fascinated by how the shows were made*." Tim Beddows, whose Network imprint have released most of Gerry's earliest series - **Four Feather Falls**, **Supercar**, **Fireball XL5** - is similarly in awe of the work of Gerry and his team, "*Fifty years on from when they were at the height of their powers you can step back and actually see what they did, how they did it and how creative they were. It was just a unique and astonishing way of filmmaking*," he says.

"*As a teenager I was always searching for behind the scenes info about the Supermarionation shows*," continues Stephen. "*There seemed to be quite a dearth of it. The Internet yielded some answers - but never quite enough. As I headed into my late teens, I started to contact some of the original cast and crew who very kindly answered questions for a website I ran*."

At age nineteen, Stephen put together **Full Boost Vertical**, a documentary about the making of **Supercar**. *"It's a bit amateurish, but it was quite a big project considering I didn't really know how to make films. Over the course of making **Full Boost Vertical**, I started to realise that many of the accepted facts and anecdotes about Supermarionation were wrong, which led me to dig a bit further. As time went by, I started to piece together what I believe to be a more accurate version of the history of Supermarionation. Previously, writers were mainly interested in **Thunderbirds** - and tended to look at the other shows only briefly. However, a lot of the really fascinating story about the development of these shows is to be found in the early days."*

Full Vertical Boost led almost directly on to Stephen's book - entitled **Filmed in Supermarionation: A History of the Future** - which ultimately became the starting point for the new documentary. *"Following the **Supercar** doc, I wanted to get a documentary about **Thunderbirds** and/or Supermarionation off the ground in time for the 40th anniversary of **Thunderbirds**. It nearly came to fruition, but as is inclined to happen in the film business - it didn't! In 2004, I went to the San Diego Comic-Con and met the guy who runs Hermes Press. He said: 'You should write a book about this stuff'. It only took me four years, but eventually I got around to it and it was published in 2009. Network are now putting out an updated and superior version - hardback and fully illustrated which is what I wanted in 2009 but didn't quite get!"*

Tim Beddows was familiar with Stephen's book and after Gerry's death in 2012 the idea of putting together a comprehensive documentary tribute to his work took shape. Stephen quickly became the obvious man for the job. *"I was struck by the lack of tributes and thought it might be nice to do something,"* says Stephen. *"I'm fortunate to own a career-spanning interview with Gerry from 2007 for a project of mine called **Stand by for Action**. It's five hours long and possibly the best interview he ever gave, and I thought Network - who I'd worked with previously - would be the right people to do something with it. Tim and I got together in early 2013 to discuss maybe putting the interview out as a web interview. Five months later, I was at Bray Studios with a team of special effects technicians working across three stages. I'm not quite sure how we got to that point! Needless to say, once I knew we were going to tell the story of Supermarionation, I knew it'd be my only chance. So the whole team agreed to try and make this as big as possible."*

Tim Beddows recalls how the project quickly escalated from the planned 'website exclusive' format. *"It's interesting how it came about because the film evolved as tribute because the more we talked about it and the more enthusiastic we got, we realised there was something bigger and better in this. We'd worked with Stephen quite a number of years before, when we commissioned him for special features for our special edition DVD releases. This guy knows 'everything'; his research skills are second to none. He's imaginative and creative and once we had decided to embark on this full-length film, more and more people came on board. I particularly didn't want to confine Stephen or restrict his ambition for the film. We worked out the budget for the film, and I knew it was going to increase as more and more information emerged. Stephen had written his book and the film necessitated additional research but in the course of making the film, he's found out things that he just didn't know when he wrote the book."*

Filmed in Supermarionation takes us right back to the early days of AP Films, with Gerry and

his business partner Arthur Provis struggling to find work for their talented team at their studio space established at the austere Islet Park mansion house in Maidenhead. Early successes with the fearsome Roberta Leigh's puppet show commissions - **The Adventures of Twizzle** and its follow-up **Torchy the Battery Boy** - led to the development of the original cowboy puppet series **Four Feather Falls,** from an idea by Barry Gray, who would himself go on to create so many of the memorable and strident signature tunes which would characterise the Anderson shows. The narrative of how AP Films went from strength to strength (eventually rebranding itself as Century 21 Productions in 1966) and strode through the sixties with ever more ambitious series from **Supercar**, **Fireball XL5**, **Stingray**, **Thunderbirds** and beyond, is one which is more than familiar to Gerry Anderson fans. But Stephen is keen that **Filmed in Supermarionation** is appreciated and recognised as a tribute, not just to Gerry and his then-wife Sylvia, but to everyone who played a part in bringing the shows so vividly to the screen. *"One thing I'm keen to stress is that this is not Gerry Anderson's story,"* he says. *"It's the story of the team. It's the human story that often gets overlooked in other accounts of how these shows were made. Countless pages are devoted to how to make a puppet, but very rarely do people focus on the interpersonal relationships of the crew. The story of AP Films is fascinating. A group of filmmakers set out, desperate to make big motion pictures, but they can only get work with puppets. They push and push the technology until eventually they do end up making big motion pictures - albeit with marionettes. However, the secret to their success is the team spirit that drives them. Unfortunately, success must mean that 'us and us' eventually becomes 'them and us', and so the empire breaks apart. It's a fantastic story."*

Network's Tim Beddows agrees. *"It's bizarre because we're all so used to it now; we're all so used to seeing **Thunderbirds** and the like and people just don't appreciate what went into the making of those shows, and I hope that what we've done is to pay tribute to the skills of the people who made them all those years ago. It's fascinating stuff, as interesting as the history of Television Centre or Ealing Studios; it's culturally important."*

Jamie Anderson, Gerry's son and, now, custodian of his father's legacy as the director of Anderson Entertainment (which is also moving forward with new projects based on existing titles, as well as from Gerry's unproduced and unfinished concepts), is similarly enthusiastic about the film and its treatment of his father's work. *"It's all been covered so many times before in different documentaries, but none of them have done it this way,"* he says. *"I think it'd be so easy to go down a very 'fan' route and look at very technical and episodic aspects of the series but what Stephen has managed to do is tell the story of a group of wonderfully-talented people who came together and had a fantastic time doing something pioneering. It's a very human story."*

Amongst the most poignant and evocative sequences in the film are those in which Jamie takes a group of the original AP Films crew - puppeteers Mary Turner, Roger Woodburn and Judith Shutt, director Desmond Saunders and director/editor David Elliott - back to Islet Park for the first time in fifty years. Later, they visit the Ipswich Road unit in Slough which became AP's home in 1962. *"I'd been down to Islet Park in the past,"* says Jamie, *"but this was the first time I'd been there and been told stories about what happened during that time by the people who'd been there. They were suddenly remembering all sorts of things and discussing between them where various offices and structures were within the building, which*

wouldn't have happened if we hadn't taken the time to gather them together and take them there. David Elliott, in particular, was especially close to Dad and, as a result, I've become really good friends with him which is great for me; I spend far too much time talking with David about all the nonsense that he and Dad used to get up to and it's helped me to understand how it all came together back in those days."

At Ipswich Road, there's a surprise in store as the shutters roll up and the visitors are confronted with an immaculately-realised and populated reproduction puppet stage - complete with a faithful recreation of the dexion bridge from which the puppeteers operated the Supermarionation stars. *"Going back to Ipswich Road with the set in place and seeing their faces - because I knew the puppets would be there but they had no idea - was lovely,"* recalls Jamie. *"It was wonderful to see their reactions and to get Roger Woodburn and Mary Turner back onto the dexion bridge working the puppets again. It was like rolling back time."*

One of Stephen La Rivière's greatest ambitions for **Filmed in Supermarionation** was to bring some of Gerry's best-remembered creations back to life in all-new sequences. The film's 'framing device' involves **Thunderbirds** stars Parker and Lady Penelope, voiced as ever by David Graham and Sylvia Anderson, holidaying on Tracy Island and reminiscing about the history of Gerry's shows and the people who made them. But bringing Parker and Penelope back to life was never going to be easy. *"I always knew that if I ever got to make a documentary about this stuff, then I wanted to do new puppet sequences,"* explains Stephen. *"I also knew that they'd be hellishly challenging. Fortunately, early last year I got a message from Justin T. Lee, a Canadian filmmaker and designer who pleaded to get involved. I told him that we wanted to do new sequences with the puppets that looked like they'd been shot in the '60s. I set him the challenge of producing a short demo which, whilst not perfect, was pretty impressive! Justin was key to getting the technical side right. He worked out how to light the characters to get the right look, and then once everything had been filmed by David Hicks, the lighting cameraman, and we had edited the sequences, Justin did all manner of things in post-production (ranging from digitally adding bits of set, through to grading of skin tones and adding film effects) to create the impression that this footage was shot fifty years ago. Authenticity went beyond that though. We hired Andy Rolfe to build the sets. Andy is a specialist at recreating the puppet sets and knows exactly where to source the right materials from. Our Tracy Island lounge is absolutely spot on! Barry Davies, who used to work with Christine Glanville, built the replica marionettes we worked with. For certain scenes, these were operated by original puppeteers Mary Turner and Judith Shutt. I just had to make sure it all looked right. Having grown up with these shows I really know how they should look. Apart from that, with my co-producer Andrew Smith, I wrote the script, operated, did some hairdressing, floor-puppeteering, and lip-sync. On a shoot like this, everyone does everything!"*

Giving life back to the puppets using predominantly the same techniques and some of the same talents who blazed a trail back in the 1960s might sound like the stuff that dreams are made of for an Anderson obsessive. Stephen's not so sure. *"Never have I been on such an utterly hellish shoot,"* he admits. *"The puppets can do almost nothing - everything they appear to do, has to be done through trickery. They break down at every possible moment - and after five days I was ready to sit in the corner rocking backwards and forwards.*

That the original team turned out so many great looking shows - and did it for twelve years - is astonishing. So my respect for them went up enormously after having attended Supermarionation Film School!"

Another highlight of *Filmed in Supermarionation* sees special effects artist Brian Johnson, whose work graced not only many of Gerry's shows but also epic feature films such as **Alien**, **Aliens** and **The Empire Strikes Back** return to Bray Studios to help recreate some much-loved Supermarionation special effects techniques. *"After we'd done the puppet stuff, I suddenly realised that the film was going to be too heavily biased in favour of the puppets and so we needed to try and represent the special effects,"* recalls Stephen. *"Whilst we were at Bray, wrapping on the puppet sections, I briefly mentioned to special effects man Leigh Took about what I hoped to do - a demonstration of three key APF techniques - and he went away and came up with a budget. We had three stages at Bray - each with models to demonstrate the various effects - underwater tank, rolling road and explosion. Brian kindly came down to explain how it all worked on camera, following which we set to work on three days of filming the effects on 35mm. The explosion is one of my favourite bits in the film. Although we weren't trying to recreate the opening titles of* ***Thunderbirds****, we wanted to capture the feel of it. Apart from adding a nice APF explosion to the film, I really think the demo sequences are important as they give you a better understanding of how certain techniques were achieved."*

Jamie Anderson was similarly impressed. *"The effects recreations are really cool,"* he says. *"I was there the day they did the blowing-up of the oil refinery and it was just so cool to see real explosions - no CGI, no composites - they just actually built this thing, filled it with charges and then blew the bloody thing up. It was really fantastic."* It's a favourite moment for Tim Beddows too. *"I'm sorry I missed that day down at Bray,"* he says. *"But that's just so spectacular and you can see that the crew were having a lot of fun doing it and to actually see those techniques demonstrated is a real 'wow' moment in the film."*

It's impossible to tell the story of those Supermarionation days without acknowledging the considerable contribution of Gerry's then-wife Sylvia Anderson. She not only returns to provide the familiar silky tones of Lady Penelope in the film's new sequences, but she is an enthusiastic interviewee, and many of those who worked with her in the 1960s are full of praise and admiration for her input to the look and style of the shows. **Filmed in Supermarionation** also includes snippets of previously-unseen video footage (filmed by Barry Gray) of the Andersons attending the World's Fair in New York (where they were inspired to move into colour production for their next series which would turn out to be **Stingray**) and extracts from a 1971 TV documentary **Something for the Children** where Sylvia talks about the couple's work from their family home.

But Gerry and Sylvia's relationship became rocky by the late 1960s and they finally split up in 1975, divorcing at the beginning of the 1980s. In later years, Gerry was reluctant to speak about Sylvia and her role in the success of the Supermarionation shows, such was the acrimony of the wake of their separation. But Jamie Anderson has no reservations about Sylvia's presence and participation in the new documentary. *"The stuff with Dad and Sylvia was really important because it's been excluded from previous documentaries because Dad specifically requested it to be excluded,*

"They actually built this thing, filled it with charges and then blew the bloody thing up. It was really fantastic!" (JA)

which I can understand but I think that at that time they were working as a team, and it's really nice to see it presented properly. I can completely understand Dad's relationship with Sylvia after the divorce and the way that they both behaved, but it's not my fight and she was obviously part of those projects and she's a voice that should be heard. I think Stephen dealt with the whole thing very well and he's produced a very balanced documentary, which is very difficult to do when you have so many voices, some of whom probably disagree with others. Stephen was very sensitive in the way he treated all the relationships, because obviously friendships and relationships break down over time, and he was very careful to make sure that everyone who was involved was happy with everything else that was going on, which isn't easy. But it was lovely to sit down and watch the entire clip from Barry Gray's archive of Dad and Sylvia at the World's Fair, just seeing Dad younger - and a bit more like me, actually! And seeing some of his very familiar ways of moving, gesturing and smiling."

Tim Beddows reveals that all this rare footage is presented in its entirety on the luxury edition of **Filmed in Supermarionation**, Network's jamboree collection, which is a veritable embarrassment of riches, containing unused and deleted documentary material, a specially-shot effects reel, a behind-the-scenes feature from BBC TV's *Tomorrow's World* and, as they say, much, much more. Also included and available in a special Blu-ray double-pack with **Filmed in Supermarionation**, is the companion release **This is Supermarionation**, which presents classic episodes in a unique and revolutionary format. Fans may be puzzled by the fact that Network, who previously have only had access to Gerry's earlier shows such as **Fireball XL5** and **Supercar**, have managed to licence episodes from the likes of **Thunderbirds** and **Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons** for the first time. *"We entered into a licensing agreement with ITV about ten years ago which gave us access to Gerry's early shows including **Four Feather Falls** which, at that point, hadn't been seen since it had been originally broadcast,"* explains Tim Beddows. *"We took what we could of the archive but ITV kept the 'cream' of the shows. But when the film started coming together we needed to get them on board to help us with various clips. They were initially a bit reticent because of the new **Thunderbirds** series which was in production, but once we'd finished the film and we showed them a rough cut they just loved it. I think they thought it was going to be some sort of fanboy thing rather than the spectacular screen experience it's turned out to be. Once we got them on board, I decided we wanted to do something a bit special for the home entertainment release. So we got the film, the extras, and we had the rights to the shows we already had but we still didn't have **Thunderbirds** and **Stingray**, and so on. I went to ITV with the idea of doing a compilation along the lines of '*you've seen the film of how they made the shows, so now here *are* the shows.' We've been able to remaster key episodes in HD and they look absolutely spectacular. Eventually it was a good marriage; ITV were more than happy to work with us with episodes and excerpts from the shows we didn't have."*

This is Supermarionation doesn't, however, just baldly present these newly-minted classic episodes. *"We have Parker and Lady Penelope and Brains introducing selected episodes from **Supercar, Fireball XL5, Thunderbirds, Captain Scarlet** and **Joe 90** and we've reinstated the ad breaks and commercial break 'bumpers'; many of the commercials they made in the*

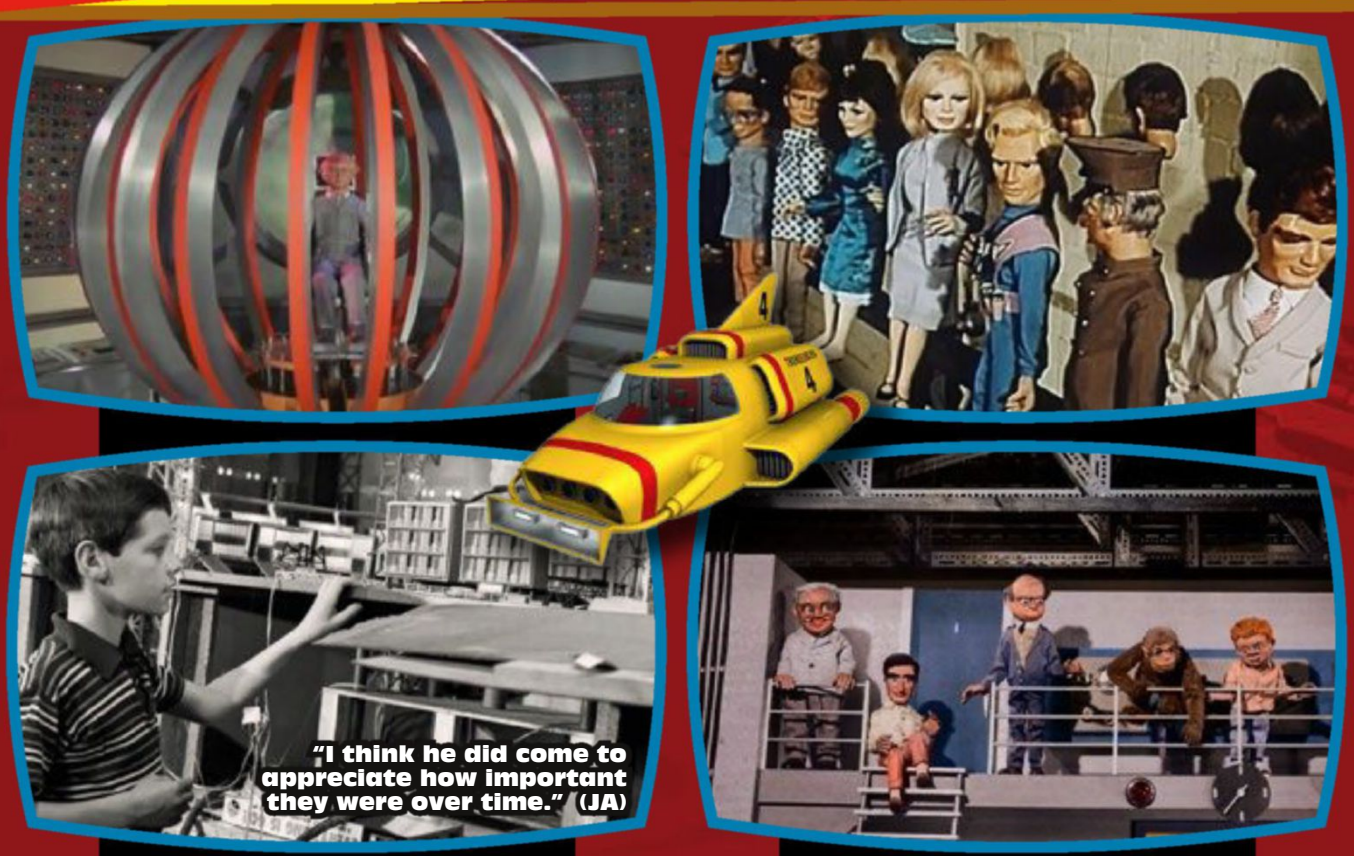
1960s, such as Sugar Smacks breakfast cereals and FAB ice lollies, and loads of other linking material," says Tim. *"It's designed to be watched from start to finish, something like three-and-a-half hours which immerses you in the world of* ***Supermarionation*** *with loads of new material, and the beautifully restored HD episodes."*

The whole **Supermarionation** package is clearly something very special; fans of Gerry Anderson, his team and the shows they meticulously crafted have never had it so good. But why have these shows stood the test of time, why do they still command the respect, devotion and unfailing dedication of fans old and new five decades and more later?

"The shows were made by a very talented team," says Stephen La Rivière. *"Everyone became an expert at what they did (Gerry and Sylvia often hired inexperienced crew and allowed them to learn on the job). That love and attention to detail comes across on the screen. Beyond that - they're unique. Where else are there shows like this? To an extent, I think they got lucky. They were trying to make the shows technologically better and better so they could move onto the holy grail of making pictures with flesh and blood actors. In the process, they stumbled on a formula where really cool looking toys came to life and were treated and filmed in a very grown up way. I think that's something kids have responded to across the years."*

"I think you could probably do a whole dissertation on that one," says Jamie Anderson. *"It's a combination of the ambition of all the people involved, starting with Dad who really wanted to make fantastic films, a sort of sci-fi* ***Ben-Hur****; he was restricted to using these puppets but he was always trying to push it further and further. Then there was Derek Meddings, pushing the designs and visual effects as far as they could possibly go, and the puppeteers and technicians making the absolute most of the technology available. It was that crazy sense of ambition which so many of the people working there had. Ultimately, if it was possible to distil everything that made it all so successful down into a formula, then you could just reapply that formula and have endlessly successful shows today! But it was all about the look of the puppets, the style of the shows, the designs, and the effects and - of course- the storytelling, which never talked down to the kids, so they've been able to find something new in the episodes when they watch them years and years afterwards. It was wholesome, entertaining and timeless. I often see on Facebook that people in their fifties and sixties are having a* ***Thunderbirds*** *weekend marathon and they've probably seen the show twenty times or more but they can still find stuff to enjoy in it."*

Tim Beddows hopes that the film will not only allow audiences to properly appreciate the work of the entire AP Films/Century 21 team, but also finally help cement Gerry Anderson's reputation as one of the UK's greatest television storytellers. *"He certainly deserves it,"* says Tim. *"I don't think he appreciated it when he was alive, he was always deprecating about having to work with puppets. We worked with him ourselves when we were preparing our DVD releases of the early shows, and he'd do commentaries and he'd be just as enthusiastic about* ***Four Feather Falls*** *as he was for the later, better-regarded shows. But I don't think he ever fully grasped how unique his style of filmmaking was. The puppets got more and more elaborate, and more human-like as the shows progressed, to the point where they*



"I think he did come to appreciate how important they were over time." (JA)

were almost substitutes for human beings at the end. He was aiming for perfection and I don't think he fully appreciated that what he did in the process was to create something absolutely unique. Those shows are his trademark throughout the world and I don't think he ever fully understood that."

"I think over time his attitude towards the puppets changed, as he realised that, actually, what they'd produced through his hatred of the 'bloody marionettes', was something really rather wonderful which people really loved, and carried on loving fifty years later," adds Jamie. *"He became more and more proud, but there was no way he would ever have wanted to work with those styles of puppets again, but I think he did come to appreciate how important they were over time."*

The ultimate aim, though, is for fans and viewers to understand just how much blood, sweat and tears went into visualising Gerry's ideas; and how the stars of Supermarionation were a fearless, determined and utterly unified team. *"I hope viewers will realise just how hard they all worked and how television and film today wouldn't be what they are without that ten-year period of intense hard work and creativity,"* says Jamie. *"It's great that people are still watching, and still fascinated enough to buy the DVD or attend the screenings, or the Premiere; but I hope it might invigorate people to realise that whilst Dad's name has always been at the top of these shows there were always so many talented people working alongside him."*

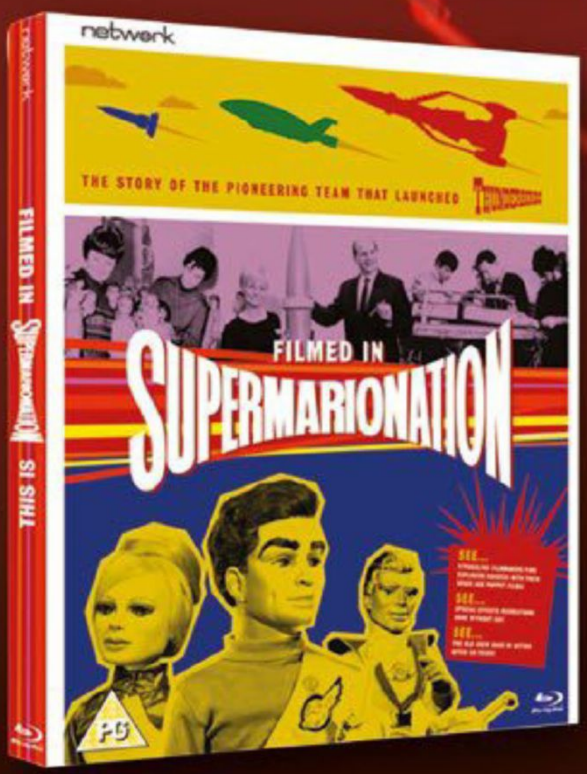
Director La Rivière sums it all up, *"I just hope people will watch this film and see how pioneering these people were, and that the film industry owes them a lot. Beyond that, I hope people will come away from* ***Filmed in Supermarionation*** *having enjoyed a great story told by some amazing characters - both human and puppet."*

FILMED IN SUPERMARIONATION is available now from Network Distributing on DVD, Blu-ray, and Limited Edition Box Set.

network

FILMED IN SUPERMARIONATION

This is the definitive documentary telling the story of the unique puppetry and animation technique developed by Gerry and Sylvia and their team and deployed in all their programmes throughout the 1960s including Stingray, Captain Scarlet and, most famously, Thunderbirds.



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Which of the following characters did NOT feature in Gerry Anderson's Supercar?

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Joe McClaine
Dr Beaker

and email your answer to
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BIRD OF PREY

by Peter Turner

It's that time of year again, and the next instalment in the ever-popular YA series THE HUNGER GAMES is almost upon us. So join us as we take a look at what to expect from THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY - PART 1...

If there is one thing the producers of *The Hunger Games* don't need, it's more comparisons to *Twilight* and *Harry Potter*. Considerably more adult-oriented than boy wizards and drastically less soppy than sparkly vampires, *The Hunger Games* has evolved from its *Battle Royale* ripping-off roots into an action-packed franchise on its own terms. However, following in the footsteps of those other spectacularly popular YA adaptations, Lionsgate announced that the final book in *The Hunger Games* trilogy would be split into two films. Cash-grab or giving the starving fans more of what they want? It's too early to tell, but the dividing of the final books in the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* franchises certainly didn't do them any harm. However, *Mockingjay Parts 1 and 2*, as they are now known, have a few mountains to climb if they are to overcome the audience's tendency towards bored shrugs. One particularly big elephant in the room is that in this last pair of films there is no arena. A *Hunger Games* film without any Hunger Games. Following *Catching Fire*, the revolution, not to mention Katniss' own District 12, is positively burning. This time the games are over. This time it's war.

Like *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* before it, *The Hunger Games* franchise has now staked a claim to an annual release date for the foreseeable future. Whereas Peter Jackson's Tolkien adaptations have claimed Christmas every year for as far back as anyone can remember, Lionsgate's own time to stick their blockbuster in the sand is aptly in November, the weekend known in the States as the Thanksgiving weekend. Audiences can be doubly thankful for each new *Hunger Games* film, but also that we haven't yet descended into reality TV shows featuring half-starved kids fighting to their bloody deaths.

It's been a year since *Catching Fire* lit up cinemas, and it will be another year until we get to see the climax, as either Katniss is crushed or President Snow falls. In the meantime, we have *Mockingjay Part 1*, released this November and telling only half of the story featured in author Suzanne Collins' final book in the trilogy. So what can we expect? Well Katniss survived the Quarter Quell in *Catching Fire* and is on her way to the once thought destroyed District 13 where she will be given a (brief) chance to recover from her second Hunger Games ordeal. Peeta is in the hands of the Capitol, District 12 has been destroyed, Gale has joined the resistance in District 13 and the people of Panem are ready to take the fight to President Snow in order to overthrow the cruel regime.

Katniss Everdeen has become an icon, a symbol of hope for the oppressed people of Panem and a particularly visible thorn in President Snow's side. Who would have thought the girl from 12 could survive two rounds of the most brutal games since *Battle Royale* splashed across screens? If being hunted in a battle to the death inside two deadly arenas was not enough, now Katniss is out, she is considered more dangerous than ever and therefore she finds herself in her most threatened position yet. The Capitol wanted to make

13
EFFIE

an example of her before but now they *really* want to break her without making her a martyr. President Snow will do anything to crush the uprising and that means getting to Katniss and killing the hope of the people. While those in District 13 have their own ideas about how to use her, Katniss will have to come to terms with the fact that everyone she loves is in grave danger.

Replacing Simon Beaufoy on writing duties for the third (and fourth) instalment of the franchise is Danny Strong. After winning an Emmy for HBO movie *Game Change*, Strong was handed the task of tackling Part 1, and after Lionsgate were happy with the script, Strong was asked to continue by penning the final film in the series. Peter Craig, writer of Ben Affleck's *The Town*, also contributed to the script before filming got underway in September 2013. With the third book featuring no arena action, the scope of these final two films is set to be much bigger than the previous entries. Atlanta, Boston, Paris and Berlin have all been used as locations in a shoot that only recently concluded in June 2014. The back-to-back filming of both *Mockingjay Part 1* and *2* means all the footage is in the can unless director Francis Lawrence decides to do a Peter Jackson and reshoot right the way up to opening night of the final film.

Although the final book contains no actual Hunger Games event this time around, there is still plenty of action. Katniss is out of the arena but she is thrust to the front lines as the revolutionaries begin to rage against the machine. If the thought of kids in bloody battles to death,

killing each other out of bloodlust and self defence seemed dark, wait till you see where these films go. *Mockingjay* will deal with the fallout from Katniss' last appearance in the arena and if she was torn over the morals of 'to kill or be killed' in the previous films, *Mockingjay Part 1* will be all about the ethics of war, propaganda and the behaviour of both her enemies and new allies. As Panem goes to war, things are going to take a turn for the increasingly nasty and casting calls put out in October hint at just some of the atrocities that are in store. People with medical staff experience, very thin people, amputees and white, pale extras who will agree to have their heads shaved were required for shooting; though whether they will show up until *Mockingjay Part 2* remains to be seen. Either way, it all sounds pretty ominous.

Luckily, Katniss will be surrounded by some familiar faces as she gets mixed up in the resistance. Liam Hemsworth's Gale will emerge as a much more interesting character in the final films, getting more screen time than ever and finally getting to spend some more time with Katniss after being kept apart from her in much of the previous films. Woody Harrelson and Elizabeth Banks return as Haymitch and Effie, while Willow Shields and Paula Malcomson reprise their roles as Katniss' little sister and mother. There are revelations aplenty in the final book, including more details on Haymitch's own experience in the arena, and watch out for Primrose's increasing role in the story as she grows and plays an important role in the resistance movement. Newcomers in *Catching Fire*, Sam Claflin, Jena Malone and Jeffrey Wright will also be key players as Katniss takes on the Capitol.

Meanwhile, over in the Capitol, Donald Sutherland returns as the evil President Snow, Stanley Tucci will reappear as the shiny-toothed television presenter Caesar Flickerman and Josh Hutcherson will get much more to do than mope around feeling sorry for himself as Peeta Mellark. Peeta is now being held by the Capitol, and will be used against Katniss and as a propaganda tool. The embarrassing wealth of fantastic actors (and Oscar winners) that this franchise has managed to snatch was crowned in *Catching Fire* with the addition of

Philip Seymour Hoffman. Returning as Plutarch Heavensbee in *Mockingjay Part 1* and *2*, tragedy struck in early 2014 when he was found dead in his home from a drug overdose. Lionsgate issued a statement in the tricky situation where any words would sound depressingly like an understatement. "*Philip Seymour Hoffman was a singular talent and one of the most gifted actors of our generation. We're very fortunate that he graced our Hunger Games family. Losing him in his prime is a tragedy, and we send our deepest condolences to Philip's family.*" Despite the huge loss to Hollywood, fortunately for the production, most of Hoffman's work on *Mockingjay Part 1* was said to be complete. Though he still had at least seven days of filming to complete on *Part 2*, the release date of the film has not been altered and director Francis Lawrence has stated that, "*We finished the majority of his work. I think he might have had 8 to 10 days left on our schedule. In most of those scenes, Phil didn't have any dialogue. We are going to put him into those scenes, but we're*

only using real footage. We're not creating anything digital or a robotic version of him." Producer Nina Jacobsen added that, "*We might give a line of Plutarch's to Haymitch or Effie, but only in circumstances that we are able to do that without undermining the intent of the scene.*"

Joining the cast for the final two parts of the series will be Julianne Moore as District 13's President Alma Coin, another strong female character to add to the Hunger Games roster. Coin will clash with Katniss over the course of *Mockingjay Part 1* and *2*, with Coin realising the potential of Katniss to become an icon of the revolution and inspire further support for her campaign against the Capitol. Katniss, on the other hand, is traumatised and untrusting even of those who saved her from the Quarter Quell arena at the end of *Catching Fire*.

Also added is *Game of Thrones*' Natalie Dormer, looking decidedly different to Margaery Tyrell, now with half-shaved head and ready to ditch the robes for battle ready gear. Dormer joins the cast as Cressida, the film director who flees the Capitol in order to help the rebellion by using her camera crew to capture the action and make District 13's very own propaganda videos. The star seems keen to replace her dresses for a chance to wade in to the action, although the character in the books had a fully-shaved head. Also drafted in from Westeros is Gwendoline Christie, who can be seen in *Game of Thrones* as the badass Brienne, and will soon appear in *Star Wars Episode VII*. In *Mockingjay*, she will be playing Commander Lyme, a former winner of a previous Hunger Games from District 2 and now a leader of the resistance in District 13.

Robert Knepper of *Prison Break* and *Arrow* fame will also be joining the final films as a character made up by the scriptwriters named Antonius. Knepper himself was tight-lipped over his role, but spent time in Paris in April shooting for the film. Filling out the rest of the cast will be Broadway

star Patina Miller as Commander Paylor and Mahershala Ali as President Coin's right hand man Boggs.

But anyone desperate to get a glimpse of these new characters in action has had a very long wait to see any real footage from the film. The marketing campaign has only very recently started delivering snippets of scenes from the film in a pair of thrilling trailers. Before that, *Hunger Games* fans have been torn between propaganda messages from the Capitol and interrupting broadcasts beamed directly from District 13. Lionsgate have opted for a wonderfully immersive series of poster and viral videos that will inspire audiences to start picking sides and ensuring followers will feel like joining the revolution. First came the creepy posters from the Capitol, displaying and celebrating the hard work and perseverance of ordinary people from the districts. These posters featured the likes of amputee Elias Haan from District 7 and little Lily Elsington clutching an apple while covered in dirt, surrounded by the mining gear associated with District 12. The desperate attempts by the Capitol to win over the people are subtly undermined by the stern faces worn by those in them.

Next there was a formal address from President Snow in which a brainwashed, docile Peeta stared blankly by his side. It seems that the Capitol's television is going into propaganda overdrive in order to regain the servitude of the districts. While the trailers have recently given fans a more standard teaser of footage from the upcoming film, it was the other viral video of Snow's second address to the people of Panem that really got the blood pumping. As Snow delivered his message to the divided nation, the screen distorted and the Capitol's pristine vision was interrupted as Jeffrey Wright's Beetee hacked his way onto the Capitol TV feed. His simple three word message to the Capitol of Panem and fans of the *Hunger Games* franchise? The Mockingjay lives.

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY - PART 1 is released in UK cinemas on November 21st.

COURSE AND EFFECTS PART 2

Words: Paddy O'Hare

We continue our extensive chat with special effects make-up artist SHAUNE HARRISON, who this month reveals some secrets from behind the scenes of his famous works, including THE FIFTH ELEMENT, HARRY POTTER, and STAR WARS: EPISODE I – THE PHANTOM MENACE...

STARBURST: Nick Dudman was another one of the guys who got you into this work, right?
Shaune Harrison: Yeah, Nick did Jack Nicholson's Joker make-up in *Batman* and worked on *Return of the Jedi* and *The Hunger* too. He was crewing-up for *The Fifth Element* and I was working on a film for Image Animation called *Killer Tongue*, which was a Spanish horror movie. It was supposed to have Bruce Campbell, Robert Englund, and Doug Bradley in it; the three icons of horror, but Bruce pulled out at the last minute. It was a really bizarre horror. At the time, *The Fifth Element* was called *Zaltman Bleros*, which was the name of Bruce Willis' character, and became the name of the Production Company Zaltman Films. I met him and joined the existing crew of thirty. Initially just for two weeks, but I ended up staying for two months, and the first thing he gave me to do was sculpt Milla Jovovich's orange costume.

We bet that was a tough job!
It was hard for me because I don't do costume sculpting! It's very regimented, it had also previously been sculpted by somebody else, but it was too baggy. We had just done this silicone suit for *Killer Tongue* and had the same issues of stretch. Nick said that we would have to take six inches of her stomach out so then it would fit really tight, and then I had to sculpt the holes as ovals so they would stretch out to circles. Nick wasn't sure it was going to work, but we tried it on Milla's double and it did. So I stayed with Nick for that film, and we did *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* in Thailand. When we were still working on it in Leavesden, we heard about *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* and we saw George Lucas around. Nick said, "*Do not tell anyone this is happening!*" We were going away to Thailand for ten weeks, so we missed the first month of *Star Wars*. I also did *The Mummy* with Nick.

Going back to *The Fifth Element*, what was your experience of Bruce Willis, considering his reputation?
Actually he was lovely, I don't know if it was because it was a film he enjoyed working on, but he was genuinely nice to people and would say hello on set and we got no ego from him at all. Even to the point where catering would give donuts to the crew but production stopped it because they said it was too expensive. Bruce paid out of his money for 500 donuts every day for the crew.

It must have been hard for Gary Oldman, because he had just come off directing *Nil by Mouth*, which was a very violent British film and was literally editing that film when he came on board *The Fifth Element*.

He gave a fantastic performance in the end; totally extravagant and bizarre.
And you know they never worked together, if you watch the film they never share a scene! Bruce Willis had finished and a few weeks later, Gary Oldman started shooting; for the hero and the bad guy in the film that's quite odd, but it was a great project to work on.

There seems to be a move back to using practical effects, and it looks like they are doing as much practically as possible in *Star Wars VII*. You just have to look at stuff like *Blade Runner* on Blu-ray to see that even now those plates and mattes look perfect!
That's down to people like Douglas Trumbull, who's just a genius; *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, with lights and all that smoke-tank stuff, I just love that. I'd much rather see that than pristine CG. I think Trumbull was also underappreciated, he may have gotten a technical Oscar, but he never got one for the films he did. He was doing that Showscan stuff years ago in the '80s for large-format screen, he kind of invented IMAX there, he was always ahead of his time but just doesn't get the recognition.

Did you ever meet him?
No, I would have loved to have met him, and Dennis Muren, who he brought in on *Close Encounters*, he's another genius, and everything he does is beautiful.

You must have got to work with Muren on *Episode I*?
Yeah I met him once on *Episode I*, it was John Knoll who was doing all the plate photography stuff. It was one of the highlights of my career because I have letters from 1983 from ILM when I wrote to them for jobs. I got one back from the general manager Warren Franklin that was really sweet, he said, "*You're doing the right things for your age and there's no reason why you can't do it, why not just go for it!*" That gave me a massive boost! I see a lot of people nowadays who say they are so passionate about make-up effects and I will say "*Do you know Rick Baker?*" And they say "*No*". All I ever wanted to do in life from 12 years was what I'm doing now, but I had no idea how to do it. When I told the careers person at school that I wanted to make monsters, they suggested I become a draftsman; the best thing people could ever say to me was that you can't do it! I was lucky because my parents left me alone to make monsters; Dad just worked at the factory, Mum was a cleaner. We had no money. I had to work out a way of getting my materials, I'd go to my local dentists and ask for a bag of alginate or plaster then I'd show them my work and they would give me more.

I'd go to local potters and ask for old clay that had been thrown away and just have to keep wetting it to get it working – recycling! My Dad worked in a factory that had window putty and he'd bring balls of it back and I would make skin out of it, it used to take forever to break it down, and I'd use my Mum's make-up and make it into a paste. I didn't know any other way of doing it, you know, that was my method because nobody told me what you can and can't do.

What did you work on for *Episode I*?
Bib Fortuna, which was a remake of the *Return of The Jedi* character, with Alan Ruscoe in the make-up, but strangely enough the scene that was shot with him was cut out of the film.

Wasn't he supposed to be in the pod race scene with Jabba?
Well that scene was shot six months later in LA, with my prosthetics, but ILM decided to use a make-up guy there. We had to send photos of Alan in the make-up and explain the process. They just put it on somebody from ILM and I didn't really like it. It really bugs me when I see it because there are weird wrinkles on the side of the face because it doesn't fit, as it was sculpted for Alan's face. The sequence we shot with Alan was in the senate pods with Terence Stamp, which was second unit for weeks and weeks - just a pod in a green room, pretty boring but we all got to play creatures, I played Hammerhead!

ET gets a cameo too!
Yep ET! I felt for Roger Christian, the second unit director; he's an Oscar winner, and he was just shooting pods in a sea of green for weeks on end!

They finished off putting some deleted scenes on the DVD, but by the sounds of it, there must have been hours and hours left on the floor?
Oh God, yeah! We shot quite a lot of creatures that aren't seen in the film any more, and other things where you wonder, *"What ever happened to those sequences we shot?"* I even did baby Gamorrean Guards, we got sent over Don Post's original masks and I got to sculpt the baby versions from those which aren't in the film. We did baby versions of loads of things like Greedo, which made it in, but that was Warwick Davies in a full sized head. He's such a lovely bloke and he loved getting back into it, I've worked with Warwick loads on *Harry Potter* as well, of course. He even came into the workshop once to learn how to sculpt because he thought it was easy. After two hours he said, *"I don't know how you guys have the patience!"*, and walked out.

And that's our cue to talk about *Harry Potter*...
I'd never read the books but I think there were only four of them out when we started in June 2000. Nick rang me up and asked if I was available to do this film... We all knew what it was; one of those top-secret things, but everyone knows things. So Nick was doing it, along with Jim Henson's Creature Shop, but Nick was based at Leavesden anyway so they were happy for him to do the prosthetics. Henson's ended up doing the big animatronics stuff like the snake, the rat, and the troll. So we sculpted tonnes of goblins, which we did for months.

For one sequence, we shot over two days with Warwick as the bank teller, and Verne Troyer as Griphook. It was interesting because they weren't allowed to have American actors; it was supposed to be all British so we weren't allowed to say it was Verne! Robin Williams came in off the back of *Bicentennial Man* as he knows the director Chris Columbus, even though he wasn't going to be in the film we still hid the Verne heads just in case. We also did a Voldemort that was cut out of the film, for the death of Harry's parents, which we shot over a two-week period; it was quite a violent scene. In the film, you only ever see the hand going up to his head with the wand, but we did a full make-up on Richard Bremmer, who was initially signed for two films. They rethought it after the first film, and then eventually got Ralph Fiennes. So I did the first, second and third film, not realising I'd end up doing all eight of them which is ten years of your life!

More like a way of life than a job in the end!
It was kind of a nine-to-five job, without being arrogant, I thought I would have a job coming up next year and if the next Potter didn't start for another four to six weeks you'd think, *"Why isn't it starting now, because I need my money to come back in"*, as there's always a break. When they began *Chamber of Secrets*, I started September 10th 2001; obviously, the next day was 9/11, which changed all the security measures, and there was concern we would have to shut down while we were in pre-production. We didn't start shooting the film until the week after the release of *Philosopher's Stone* when it made the £90 million opening, and they knew they had a hit, and the funds came back in. Chris Columbus didn't stop the whole time; it was amazing as they were literally shot back to back. I had a few months in-between but I think all he got was two weeks!

Don't you have a story about when Hermione Granger turns into a cat?
Yes, Emma Watson was about 12 at this point, we got the lifecast done which was

fine, all the kids had those done, and we did months of testing because we weren't sure how far to go with the cat. The Prosthetic was actually applied to her double Felicity as the make up was so big that you wouldn't recognise her in the make-up, Emma did a voice over for it later on. Poor Felicity was terrified because she was now acting on camera; we did about three more make-up tests with her. Every six weeks, we'd have a new piece made because all the hairs are individually punched into the piece, and we'd be ready for another camera test. We had a fake tail and paws that were never actually used in the end, and they asked us to make it more beastly. Felicity did a great job in the make up though.

On the fourth one, I was doing Mad-Eye Moody for about ten months, which was complex because it was a mechanical make-up and sixty-two days of shooting was done with that make-up. It was a great character to work on and Brendan Gleeson was such a lovely man to work with, we eventually got this make-up down to just over an hour and a half which is good going as it's a pretty complicated Prosthetic. I also helped Mark Coulier on Voldemort's character; it was Mark's make-up and he had spent months on it developing the way it all went together. Paul Catling in the Art Department designed the look of the character. With a character as big as Voldemort there's always lots of collaboration with departments. It was a pretty complicated design in terms of its look, even if it looked simple in design.

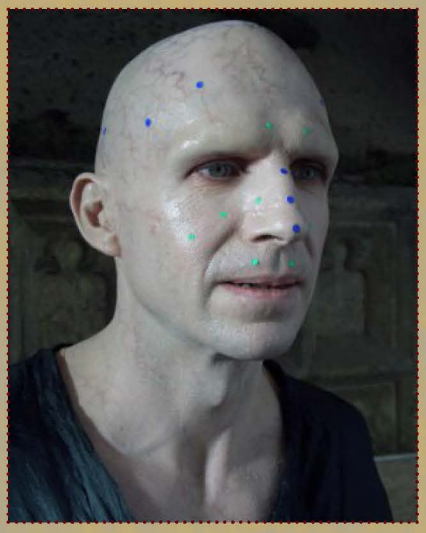
I helped Mark apply the make-up for the duration of the fourth film, the scene took around 2 weeks to shoot, which is fairly short, and we shot the scene in continuity. Working on an iconic character such as Voldemort was pretty amazing.

The Voldemort make-up was simplified quite a lot from what was initially conceived, wasn't it?
First of all we do a full body cast for the actor, which was six months prior to Ralph starting shooting, and you do all sorts, the art department do designs too. They were going for this whole idea of sagging skin, because he is supposed to be new born, so this skin would then kind of stretch back.

We did his full arms, chest, back of head (including this translucent skull that you could see into), it was complicated stuff. We started to do concept paintings of the make-ups, camera tests with doubles, and Ralph looked at it and said, "*I'm not doing any of that.*" He pointed out that he had done one of the most evil characters ever in *Schindler's List* without prosthetics and could play a monster quite easily. He told us he would be happy to shave his head but he didn't want all this complicated stuff, because the test for those had been six hours of make-up. We totally understood that, of course, because he told us he didn't want to play it that way. It was interesting watching him trying to find the character on set; running round scaring people, but not knowing quite where he was going with it, and then pulling it back more and more until it just snapped and you thought, "*Oh my God! That's Voldemort!*" It was very interesting to watch this character come to life. I remember Mike Newell wondering how it was going to be done too because it's a very delicate role you want to be evil but you don't want to be the monster at the same time. I can't thank Mark and Nick Dudman enough for letting me be part of this character.

It must have been a real leap and change of pace for Mike Newell too after doing films like *Four Weddings and a Funeral*...
What was great about Mike was he knew he didn't know FX work, and it was funny because one of the first days on set they were shooting in the great hall, Mad-Eye Moody's entrance through the side door. He comes in and looks up at the roof, which is obviously just studio lighting, and zaps it with his wand while there is flashing going off, and the camera pans up. There are five hundred kids on set and Mike yells, "*Cut! Cut! You just shot the ceiling, you can see the lights!*" and the producer says, "*No, no! That's all going to be digital up there, have you not seen it in the movies?*," he just didn't understand that yet, so he apologised and said, "*Look guys, you're going to have to train me up as you go along, I don't know blue screen.*" I thought that was really cool of him, and he was a really lovely bloke who knew what he wanted.

We can imagine he was great at getting the performances out of the actors though.
Watching him direct the kids, especially, he was amazing. He was really hard on them because you'd see them wane after fifteen or twenty takes and he had this thing of saying, "*Come on, you've never done this before, do it again!*" He was a headmaster and he was brilliant at it! One thing that happened was hilarious; while we were shooting Mad-Eye's big classroom scene for about three minutes, suddenly this Nokia ringtone goes off, and everyone checks their phone. Mike goes nuts, "*Who the hell's left their phone on?*" and hanging on the back of the chair is Mike's coat with the phone going off in it! Chris Carreras the First AD says, "*Thank Christ it was your phone Mike!*" Mike apologised, "*I don't actually know how to turn this off!*" Anyone else would've been fired for that!



He must have been the total antithesis to people like Luc Besson then?
Yes! I thought Luc was a bit of a genius and very cool, everyone looked up to him. In fact, if you look at Bruce Willis' character, it's what Luc wanted to be, you know with the dyed blonde hair, he'd walk in the workshop with his hoodie up and music blaring out, he's a very hands-on director and liked to grab the camera and shoot the movie!

You can find out more about THE SHAUNE HARRISON ACADEMY OF PROSTHETIC AND MAKE UP TRAINING by visiting ***shauneharrisonacademy.com****, where you can also view the prospectus for the courses.*

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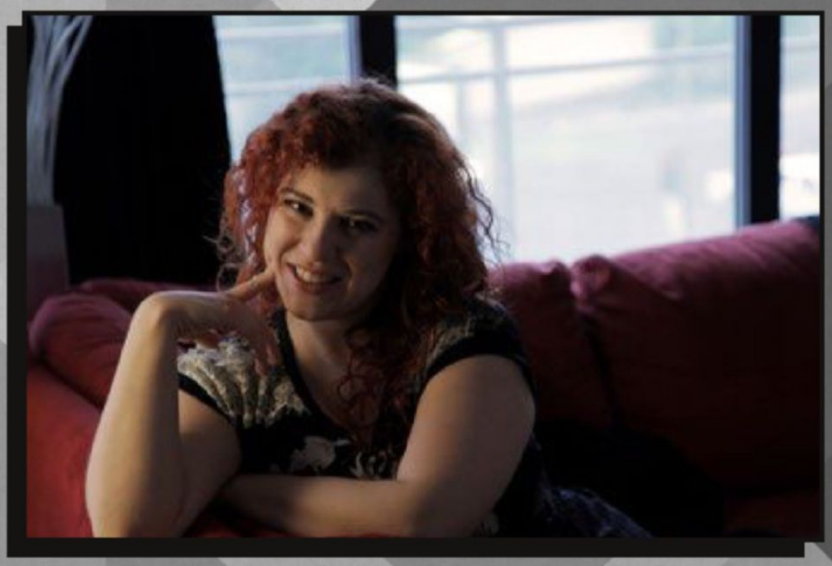
INDEPENDENTS DAY

by Martin Unsworth

Maude Michaud

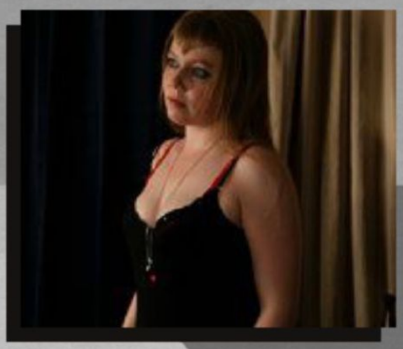
This month, we speak to up-and-coming talent from Canada, MAUDE MICHAUD, who is quite rightly being compared to DAVID CRONENBERG, largely due to her disturbing body-horror style of genre cinema...

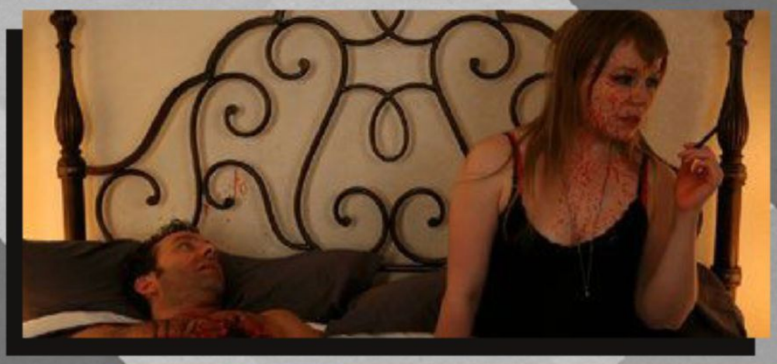


STARBURST: How did you get started in film?
Maude Michaud: When I was a kid, I wanted to become an author, so I was writing constantly. Then, a few years later, I fell in love with acting and theatre. That's when it clicked that cinema would be the perfect way to bring together these two passions I had. I started to read everything I could get my hands on about the medium, and watching movies every day. I think I was 14 or so when I announced to my parents that I wanted to become a writer/director. I was fortunate that they were supportive from the start and let me use their video camera to record little videos and skits with friends. When I was 16, I directed my first real short and entered it in a teen film festival which only confirmed that this is what I wanted to do! Then, I went to film school and kept making shorts, each of them helping me get closer to my goal and helping me learn so much about the art of cinema.

Is that first film something you can now look back on fondly, or do you treat it purely as a learning curve?
It's on a VHS tape, really well-hidden in the back of my closet! [laughs] I treat everything I did during the first 4 years (basically everything I made before *Recessed*) as a learning curve. I do cherish these shorts, as they were my first accomplishments and brought me so much joy and good memories of my first few filmmaking 'baby steps', but I still had so much to learn about how to make a film when I made them... Some are pretty embarrassing!

While your films are quite obviously within the horror genre, they touch on many different themes, and play more like horrific dramas. What is it about the horror of normality that interests you?
When I was a kid, I loved everything that was macabre. I would watch *Beetlejuice* and wish I could be Lydia, I was in love with *Edward Scissorhands*, I wanted the Addams family to be my family, I read Edgar Allan Poe, celebrated Friday the 13th, counted the days until Halloween... So I was always a bit of an outcast and I never understood why other kids thought I was so strange. For me it was all normal, and their vision of normality was so boring. Then, growing up, I became fascinated by how obsessed people are with attaining what they





RED

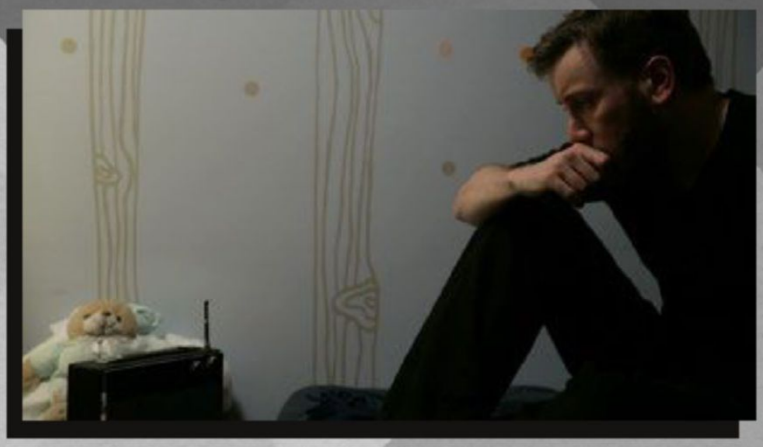
consider 'normal' or 'ideal' without ever really questioning why this is what they want. I always found the obsession with conformity and with becoming the perfect model of what society wants you to be - looks, gender roles, life decisions, etc. - to be deeply upsetting and horrifying. The whole question of perception became one of my favourite themes to explore. I wanted to take people out of their comfort zone by forcing them to see reality that is not theirs; by encouraging them to think differently. I don't know if that really answers your question, but I feel that the horror of normality - by the way, I love this description! - which is present in my work stems from that.

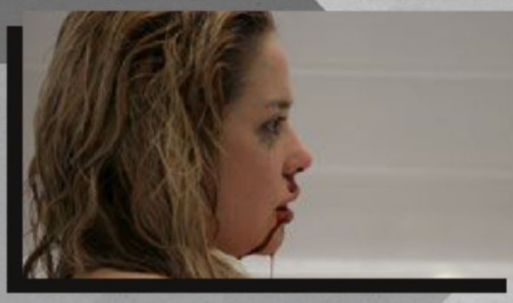
One of your projects, *Bloody Breasts*, is one that deserves some attention; and things have improved slightly since that was made, do you think women are finally beginning to be taken seriously in the genre?
I definitely think the creation of the Women in Horror Recognition Month, and the Viscera Film Festival [in Toronto, now no longer running] helped anchor the idea that women can be more than Scream Queens within the horror genre. It helped get the work of women filmmakers out there, and inspired countless others to pick up a camera and shoot a film. Equal opportunities have unfortunately not been attained yet, but at least women horror filmmakers are taken more seriously now. We're no longer an oddity and this is a huge step forward.

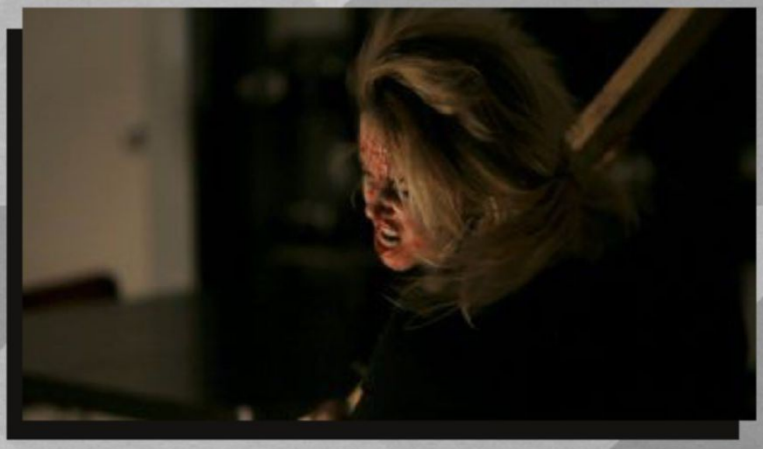
Absolutely, but there's so much talent out there beyond the Soska Sisters, but at least the door is ajar, if not fully open! Could we expect a second season perhaps, or something similar?
I really want to! I've been wanting to do a follow up because so many things have happened since *Bloody Breasts* was shot! That was before the first Women in Horror month happened! But it's such a huge time and financial commitment if I continue the project as is. I'm basically alone, doing everything: research, shooting, editing, promotion, etc. I'm trying to see if I could change the format to have each episode focus on the work of one woman in particular, which would help facilitate the process. So, no promises, but it might happen in a near future!

Our readers may not have come across you yet, but you have been quite prolific, making several brilliant short films, and you have made your first full length feature; how did you find the transition between short and long form?
The transition was relatively smooth. I've had shorts with a way more hellish shoot than the feature! I often had a bit of frustration when writing shorts because the idea I would come up with would be too complex or too long for the format. I always had to narrow it down and simplify it. It was truly freeing to write a feature because I finally felt like the story could be what it needed to be, without compromises! I had more freedom. As for the production, being on set is one of my favourite things in the world, so it was amazing to have the opportunity of doing it several weeks in a row as opposed to just a few days when I would shoot my shorts.

***Dys*-, your first feature, was premiered at Fantasia in Montreal, how did that go?**
It was amazing! Most of the cast and crew were in attendance, and they all got to experience it for the first time there. We shot the film a year and a half ago, so it was the end of a long journey and everybody was ecstatic to see the end result! It's not an easy film and it's pretty much a "feel bad" movie, so getting a







positive response from those who saw it, and being told that the film made some people feel physically ill tells me I did a good job as a director! The film won the public choice award for best Canadian film, so that's the cherry on top!

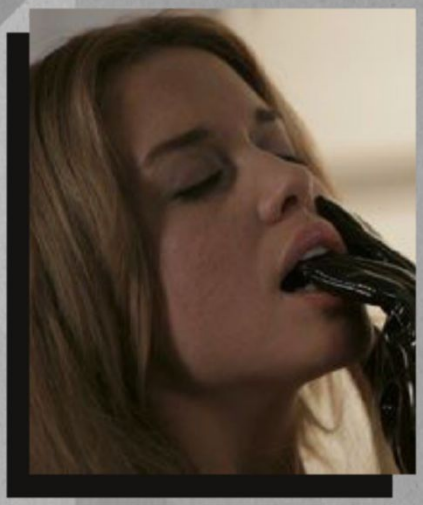
***Dys-* is likely to be a very troubling film for some people; perhaps even too close to home. Is challenging the viewer important do you think, particularly in genre?**
As a viewer, I like to be challenged, so it is important for me to also challenge people with my work. To me, the most effective horror is the kind that gets under your skin and stays with you long after the film is done or forces you to question your worldview. I like to be taken out of my comfort zone just as much as I like to take people out of theirs, and genre films are the kind of cinema that allows that. This is why I like it so much.
I also think it is crucial that people keep making uncomfortable genre films, because it's pretty much the only place in the realm of cinematic genres where it is possible to explore more taboo, dark subject matters and find an audience for the film. That being said, not everyone likes this kind of film. Most people prefer more formulaic or "easy" entertainment, like mindless horror films and silly 'B' horror movies. And it's awesome that these two can co-exist within genre cinema, because I think this balance is important for it to survive and continue to evolve.

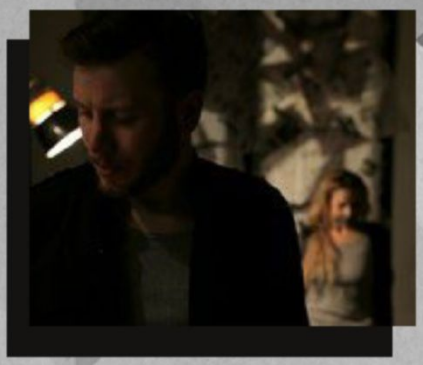
Have you had any problem with actors feeling uncomfortable with what they are expected to do within your films?
No, because I always take the time to discuss the role with them before shooting begins, and I'm always upfront with them with what the role involves and what I expect from them. Sometimes, we have to work together and find a middle ground, which is totally fine. For me, it's important that they know full well what my expectations are and that they are okay with it because once we're on set, it's the worst time to start reconsidering how something will be done. And, of course, when we shoot a difficult scene, I always talk with actors to see what I can do to make them more comfortable. Whether it's asking everybody to leave them alone for five minutes, to prep and shoot everything in complete silence, or giving them a shot of vodka; I always comply!

Your films can be likened to those of David Cronenberg, and with *Dys-* you managed to get Lynn Lowry to appear, was that a conscious nod?
It was! I've been wanting to work with Lynn for a really long time and I thought *Dys-* would be a nice way for us to have a first collaboration, even though she only has a small part. Given the setting of the film and the viral outbreak subplot that are both similar to *Shivers*, I figured it would be a great nod for horror fans.

Are there any other festivals where people can see *Dys-*?
The film is beginning its festival circuit and the plan is to screen it in as many countries as possible! I'm still waiting on a few confirmations from festivals, and my lips are sealed about some of them until the official festival announcements, but if you really want it to play somewhere, request it to your local festival!

The internet has opened the world up for indie filmmakers; there's an outlet for their work without having to travel around to festivals as much, but do you feel that aspect is still important?
I think it is, because the internet is a bit of a double-edge sword: yes there's an easy outlet for indie films, but there are so





many out there it is really hard to stand out. I think festivals are important for building an audience and triggering word of mouth. Plus, as a filmmaker, I think it's crucial to meet your audience and see who these people are. I like to know who likes to watch my film and I'm pretty sure these people also like to know who I am. A good audience response is what makes it possible for an indie filmmaker to make other films and that is what festivals help nurture. Plus, getting to experience the film with hundreds of people and seeing their reactions is simply amazing, and really helps me grow as a filmmaker by seeing what works best with people and what doesn't work so well.

So, what will you be working on next?
I'm currently writing two very different feature scripts: one of them is a ghost story, the other one is a really dark psychological thriller about filmmaking. I don't know yet which one will be made first, but I have a feeling it might be the ghost story, which would be a really refreshing change as I haven't really dabbled into supernatural horror so far, so it's super exciting!

*You can check out the DYS- website, **www.homeiswherethehurtis.com** or the Facebook page: **www.facebook.com/homeiswherethehurtis** for all the upcoming screenings, and also catch up with Maude's previous short films by heading to **www.quirkfilms.ca**.*

REVIEW:

DYS-

CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: MAUDE MICHAUD / STARRING: SHANNON LARK, ALEX GOLDRICH, JOSEPH LAZARE, LYNN LOWRY / RELEASE DATE: TBC

Maude Michaud's debut feature amps up the physical and emotional horror seen in her earlier shorts, and likewise the human drama that makes them so relatable and compelling. Opening the film with the definition of the prefix dys- sets the tone perfectly, as almost every situation that transpires is diseased, abnormal or faulty; difficult or painful; unfavourable or bad.

The citizens of Montreal are coming down during a deadly flu-type pandemic that is turning sufferers into rabid monsters, Eva (Lark) and Sam (Goldrich) face troubles of their own. Their relationship is strained enough as it is; Eva is attempting to get a job after years as a model, Sam - also her regular photographer - has found a younger woman to use for his work. "How well do you handle stress?" she is asked at an interview. Well, it appears not as well as she makes out. She is tense, obsessively clean, and patently sexually frustrated - behind the door of the room that she once shared with Sam she fantasises about various S&M trysts.

Sam's friend and their neighbour, James (Lazare) invites himself to dinner and makes the situation worse, particularly when he coughs up blood all over Eva. Forced to spend time together when the authorities advise people to stay indoors, they barricade themselves against the murderous, zombie-like infected. Over the next few days, Sam becomes increasingly paranoid, and Eva's physical and mental health deteriorates, particularly when she makes a disturbing and deplorable decision.

Cronenberg alumni Lynn Lowry appears briefly as Eva's mother, and within those fleeting moments reveals more about the cause of Eva's problems than any amount of explanation could.

What's striking about Ms Michaud's film is that the very real emotional drama (and, indeed, horror) sits so perfectly well with the 'fantasy' scenario being played-out beyond the walls of the couple's apartment. It works so well that the epidemic outside the walls is merely a background (and indeed, MacGuffin) to underline the characters' own personal breakdown of their mental and physical states. With a subtle sound design, and claustrophobic atmosphere, it's difficult to escape the imposing oppression of the situation. Although neither character is sympathetic, we constantly guess and care about what trauma has caused their relationship to become so volatile, the truth drip-fed in flashback as the story goes along. Initial assumptions are subverted, and the reality more surprising and shocking than one could ever imagine.

The illnesses depicted in the film are all extreme, but surprisingly relatable, underlining that the sickness of the mind is a terrible and destructive thing. For all parties involved. And sickness comes in many forms.

Dys- is uncomfortable, uncompromising, and incredibly disturbing; but also powerful filmmaking that signals a declaration of intent from a director who has a future well worth watching. Not afraid to push the boundaries of what's expected from cinema - regardless of gender, and not adverse to repelling and horrifying an audience. If you're waiting for the next Cronenberg to come along, keep your eyes on Maude Michaud.

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS

HORNS

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ALEXANDRE AJA / SCREENPLAY: KEITH BUNIN / STARRING: DANIEL RADCLIFFE, JUNO TEMPLE, DAVID MORSE, JOE ANDERSON, MAX MINGHELLA / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 31ST

As a man who made quite the rep for himself with 2003's Haute Tension/Switchblade Romance, Alexandre Aja is a name that will be familiar with most casual horror fans. Flitting from The Hills Have Eyes to Mirrors to Piranha 3D, he is a director who has dipped his toes into several horror subgenres. But don't be expecting out and out horror here, for Horns is something truly different.

The central premise focuses on Ig Perrish (Radcliffe) and his mission to prove that he didn't kill his one true love, Merrin (Temple). With seemingly nobody believing him, Ig wakes after one hazy night to find that he has horns sprouting out of his temples. Even more bizarrely, it soon becomes apparent that said horns cause people to deal with him in a different way; now people lose their inhibitions and tell Ig, for better or for worse, what they really think and feel. Using this ability to unearth some often horrible truths, he sets out to find out who really killed the love of his life.

Horns is a film that is hard to pin down in the most simple of descriptive terms. It has elements of horror, romance, black humour, suspense, heartbreak, whodunit, classic twists, and an underlying brutal edge that flips the film on its head at a moment's notice. As Ig trundles down the winding road to find out why his world was shattered, the film is constantly engaging, entertaining, heartfelt and soulful. And key to all of this is Daniel Radcliffe.

Yes, the now 25-year-old Radcliffe had a mighty task ahead of him to shake off the tag of a certain young wizard, but the actor does enough here to show that he really is a special performer. Delivering an antihero of sorts, complete with religious satire and undertones, Radcliffe displays a vast array of emotions as his Ig is put through the ringer physically and emotionally. His performance comes across as sincere, heartfelt and multi-layered, much like the film that he is headlining.

With strong supporting turns throughout, particularly David Morse as Merrin's anguished father, and some truly stunning cinematography work, Horns is a film that is a pleasure to watch. The soundtrack is perfectly suited to the tone of the picture, and the rich, stylish, rough-around-the-edges tone of the film helps to masterfully adapt Joe Hill's novel of the same name, even if there are some slight story tweaks. Brimming with the same vibe as Brick, John Dies at the End, Odd Thomas or even Dogma, Horns is a magical, twisted ride that shows that Alexandre Aja really is a fantastic talent and that Daniel Radcliffe is a devilishly talented actor who has well and truly left that speccy-wearing wizard in his dust.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED 7

ACTUAL 8

DRACULA UNTOLD

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: GARY SHORE / SCREENPLAY: MATT SAZAMA, BURK SHARPLESS / STARRING: LUKE EVANS, DOMINIC COOPER, SARAH GADON, CHARLES DANCE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the seemingly infinite variations of the Dracula mythos available in movies, TV, books, and comics what mysteries could possibly lurk in this latest retelling to warrant the label "Untold"?

Not many, as it turns out, but this self-assured remix of the original neck-biter combines elements of back story from the classic Bram Stoker's Dracula, with those of his supposed inspiration; Vlad Tepes (aka "The Impaler"), with the added wrinkle that this Vlad had a much nobler purpose in mind when it comes to becoming a creature of the night.

In this version of the legend, Vlad, Prince of Transylvania, is a former child soldier, one of a thousand Transylvanian children stolen from their homes and pressed into the service of the all-conquering Turkish army. Having reluctantly earned his "Impaler" moniker fighting for the Turks, the Prince has since retired to tend to his family and people in peace, at least until the Turks come once again for the sons of Transylvania, including his own.

With no chance of defeating the Turkish hordes with his meagre army, Vlad is forced to turn to an unnatural presence in "Broken Tooth Mountain" to strike up a Faustian bargain to protect his people.

The initial ludicrousness of casting Dracula as a hero and reluctant monster quickly wears off and ends up working beautifully, thanks to the handling of the story and Luke Evans' (and Charles Dance's) performances. As with so many other vampire stories before it, Dracula Untold appears to cherry pick the elements of the legend it wishes to use, leaving out many of the story's more familiar components and seeming wholly revisionist, until a well known aspect suddenly crops up unexpectedly, usually accompanied by a grin of recognition on the audience's faces. A non-spoiler example would be that Vlad's wife is definitely not called Mina, and yet that name still manages to finagle its way into the story later on.

The other main twist in the tale is that Dracula's vampirism has an older, darker origin; and while he has been blessed with all the strengths of a vampire to save his people, he has not yet doomed his soul and still has a chance to regain his humanity if he can resist a terrible temptation.

Evans sells this anguish well, dancing between moments of strength, darkness, hunger and fear of the very people he wishes to protect, lest they discover what he has become. In a relatively minor role, Charles Dance funnels all the menace of Tywin Lannister from Game of Thrones into a much more sinister form, and Sarah Gadon, while initially weak as Vlad's wife, is given much more to do in the later stages of the film.

Opposing Dracula, as head of the Turkish army, Dominic Cooper's Mehmed II provides a worthy adversary, with enough care having gone into the script to give him the intelligence to come up a few effective ways to counteract the Prince's new powers, rather than just be a one-note villain.

The rest of the supporting cast do not fare so well. Vlad's compatriots are mostly made up of interchangeable beards (wise-beard, overly-protective-beard, dies-in-first-act-beard), and while the Turks are more distinguishable from each other visually, there is little character behind them. A blond, sneering, plaited henchman that recurs throughout the film is given little character past his name in the credits: "Bright Eyes".

These are but minor quibbles, as adding more moments for these characters would have added to the film's brisk 92 minutes, the perfect amount of time to dabble in the vampire playground, throw up a few surprises here and there and keep the audience from becoming bored.

A confident first feature from commercials director Gary Shore, who handles his story, actors and effects well although some fight scenes are a bit blurry in IMAX, but that is difficult to avoid. The inventiveness of the reveal of Dracula's new powers also bodes well for future projects.

Dracula Untold does a far better job reinventing a classic villain as a hero than both the recent Maleficent and the plodding I, Frankenstein. The sequel hinted to at the end of the film, along with references to a "game" with another, as yet unrevealed, immortal will be most welcome if Shore and team can continue to reinvigorate legends in such an enjoyable way.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED 4

ACTUAL 8

THE EQUALIZER

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ANTOINE FUQUA / SCREENPLAY: RICHARD WENK / STARRING: DENZEL WASHINGTON, MARTON CSOKAS, CHLOË GRACE MORETZ, DAVID HARBOUR, BILL PULLMAN, MELISSA LEO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Denzel Washington is on fire again. With him cast opposite a little girl, strutting smoothly away from mammoth explosions and taking down bad guys in all sorts of brutal ways, you'd be forgiven for thinking this is a belated sequel to Man on Fire. Only this time, Dakota Fanning has been replaced by a considerably older and worryingly sexualised Chloë Grace Moretz, all proper grown up since those Kick-Ass flicks and now playing a Jodie Foster-alike teen prostitute who needs protection from Russian pimps.

The Equalizer sees Washington play the titular vigilante in an update of the '80s TV show. Washington's Robert McCall is now considerably more vicious than Edward Woodward ever was, playing one of those typical ex-military guys who wakes before his alarm, keeps his hair rigorously cropped and polishes his shoes with a toothbrush each morning. He can't sleep (probably due to his morally dubious past) so he reads in an all-night diner, where he meets Moretz's troubled teen Teri. Dressed to impress her punters, she has dreams of becoming a singer but is stuck in a nasty situation with violent customers and an even nastier Russian pimp named Slavi. When Teri is beaten so badly that she ends up in intensive care, McCall refuses to sit by any longer and begins to use his severe skills to start exacting retribution on those he feels need help equalling the score.

Aptly for a reboot, the character and the story feel like absolutely nothing new here. The only surprises come a short way into the film when Moretz disappears after giving a mesmerising performance in the early scenes, and then Washington appears to dispatch all the bad guys at the end of the first act. Of course, there are bigger fish to fry for McCall, and Moretz's untimely bow from the film is the catalyst for the rest of Washington's rampage of revenge. Washington does this kind of cool, calm character while sleepwalking now and despite the odd spouting of clichés, both Washington and Moretz soar in their few emotive scenes together.

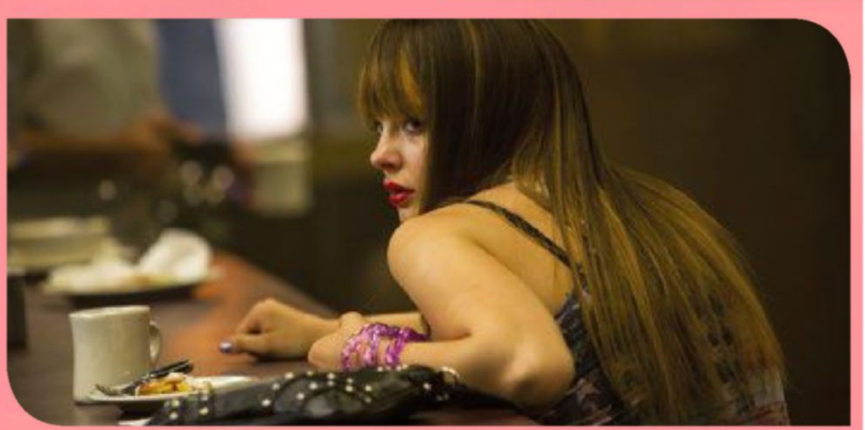
However, The Equalizer is, unsurprisingly, not really about emotion. Director Antoine Fuqua's previous film Olympus Has Fallen was unfairly slated by many but had a joyous mix of brutal bloodletting and black humour. The Equalizer follows suit with some truly nasty villains; all tattooed dead-eyed psychopathic Russians with plenty of money but absolutely no heart. It's lucky Denzel's around with some seriously impressive skills to see to these pesky Russkies. And see to them he does. Fuqua relishes the violence with every kill gloriously brutal and satisfyingly gory. When you see the way these bad guys treat women, you will be lusting for the cathartic take-downs that McCall delivers to his victims. Most excitingly, it all leads up to a hardcore version of Home Alone in a hardware store which gives a whole new meaning to the phrase DIY.

While Fuqua goes a little heavy on the Washington worship, (watch in awe as he walks away from an explosion or drips menacingly under some sprinklers) The Equalizer is undoubtedly a thrilling character to watch. With his impressive skill set, he never really appears to be in danger so it is unfortunately left to all the female characters (read: prostitutes) to suffer at the hands of the villains. Hit Girl gets hit and then gets her ass seriously kicked, and the fate of any other prostitutes in the movie becomes despairingly inevitable. Washington has fun with his charismatic vigilante but the brooding score, and frequent literary references (McCall is a big reader) attempt to make you take The Equalizer more seriously than your average action thriller. After taking on corrupt cops and seemingly the entire Russian mob without seeming to break much of a sweat, it will be interesting to see if a sequel can find a villain who will truly be the equal of Washington's Equalizer.

PETER TURNER

EXPECTED 6

ACTUAL 7



ANNABELLE

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JOHN R. LEONETTI / SCREENPLAY: GARY DAUBERMAN / STARRING: ANNABELLE WALLIS, WARD HORTON, ALFRE WOODARD, TONY AMENDOLA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Conjuring was such a success that a sequel/prequel/spin-off was inevitable, but rather than taking another page from the casebook of supernatural investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren, the producers have decided to leave out Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga altogether and instead focus on the malevolent doll first glimpsed in The Conjuring's prologue.

Introducing the doll via the same scenes from The Conjuring, this prequel jumps to a year before, and expectant couple, John and Mia, as John presents Mia with the doll to join her collection. Despite Ed Warren's assumption in the previous film that "there's no such thing as Annabelle and there never was", a nasty run-in with the neighbouring Higgins family's wayward daughter (who is also definitely not seven!) soon convinces otherwise, but John, Mia and the doll survive, if a little traumatised.

From this point, it's only a matter of time before the doll goes on the rampage - but a Chucky movie this is not. Annabelle has a lot more in common with Rosemary's Baby than Brad Dourif's homicidal toy, with Mia frequently left on her own as strange things happen around her; left with little to do but question her post-trauma, and later post-partum, sanity.

With all fairness to director Leonetti, director of photography on The Conjuring, the film keeps things mostly scary, and manages to avoid many tropes of horror movies that leave the audience screaming at the dumb characters on screen. The doll itself is not overly used, even though it's horrid to look at even before it becomes possessed (the real life Annabelle was a much less threatening Raggedy Ann doll).

There's some very effective tension built up with a sewing machine, and the film makes excellent use of the modern horror beats of something scary happening in the background while a character looks elsewhere in the foreground. There's also some nicely creepy gags with a swinging door and a creepy lift; but all of this is let down by the film's uneven pacing. While John and Mia are no slouches when it comes to movie devices - wisely moving homes after the traumatic event and ditching the nasty doll the first chance they get - much of the film is spent following Mia around at a languid pace while things threaten to happen. Once the tension has built to near breaking point and the supernatural threat has been clearly shown on screen, the film makes the mistake of shifting down a gear, losing much of its momentum.

This continues through to a lacklustre ending, the film veering towards two possible conclusions that would have haunted audiences leaving the cinema and instead delivering an ending that comes off as far safer, and much more forgettable.

Despite all of this, the film fails to answer the one burning question raised about Annabelle in The Conjuring: "Why would ANYONE find these horrifying dolls CUTE!??"

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED 8

ACTUAL 6

THE MAZE RUNNER

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: WES BALL / SCREENPLAY: NOAH OPPENHEIM, GRANT PIERCE MYERS, T.S. NOWLIN / STARRING: DYLAN O'BRIEN, AML AMEEN, KI HONG LEE, BLAKE COOPER, THOMAS BRODIE-SANGSTER, WILL POULTER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The latest aspirant to the Young Adult throne currently occupied by The Hunger Games, the film adaptation of James Dashner's The Maze Runner ditches the now seemingly obligatory love triangle and replaces it with a heavy dose of mystery, focusing on a group of boys trapped in an agrarian glade at the heart of a harsh and inhospitable maze. The film closely follows Thomas (O'Brien), the latest amnesiac arrival in the community, who like the other boys remembers only his name, as he and the audience are thrust into a new and confusing world. As he acclimatises to his situation, the rules are slowly explained: the glade has received fresh recruits and some minor supplies once a month for the past three years; no one is permitted to enter the maze except the "Runners"; the runners map the maze, trying to find a way out; the maze is different every day, reconfiguring itself at night; the runners must return by sundown each day before the door to the maze closes; there is something (or many somethings) in the maze at night; no one has ever survived a night in the maze. But as Thomas gets used to his surroundings and its inhabitants, he discovers that even within the glade, all is not as it seems.

The Maze Runner manages to move along at a fair pace, never spending too long dwelling on its secrets before introducing an unexpected action scene or building up its cast of characters, a mix of relatively unknown actors alongside some familiar faces such as Poulter (Son of Rambow) and Brodie-Sangster (Game of Thrones).

Unlike many other films based around a central mystery, the final reveal is interesting enough that it doesn't come as an anticlimax, and the hints handed out along the way should ensure that the audience's own theories will be in the right area. The film is, however, let down by a strange reluctance to deal with the grittier elements of its premise and is ultimately derailed by a final act that concentrates far too much on setting up potential sequels.

One of the strengths of The Hunger Games was that it dealt honestly with the brutality of its core concept, horrifically slaughtering cherubic children in the opening seconds of the first Games portrayed in the series. The Maze Runner, on the other hand, tends to shy away from such moments. Yes, the boys do have to handle one of their own gone rogue, but it's dealt with in a way that absolves them of any real responsibility. Apart from a minor scene where Thomas is sent to get "fertiliser", there's also no acknowledgement of how hard it would be for a community made up of teen and pre-teen boys to survive on their own. Food and shelter seems plentiful. Hard times are mentioned, but never really elaborated on. Even "The Pit", the boys' version of solitary confinement, looks rather cosy.

Whatever character conflicts do occur, they are nothing along the lines of the Lord of the Flies tribalism that you would expect from a bunch of stranded young men. All the most interesting character interactions seem to have occurred before Thomas' arrival, helpfully freeing him up to nose around and upset the status quo, but at the cost of leaving the other actors with little to do. Overall, The Hunger Games need not worry too much.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED 8

ACTUAL 6

THE LATEST HOME VIDEO RELEASES REVIEWED & RATED

REVIEWS

BLACULA - THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: WILLIAM CRAIN, BOB KELLJAN / SCREENPLAY: RAYMOND KOENIG, JOAN TORRES, MAURICE JULES / STARRING: WILLIAM MARSHALL, VONETTA MCGEE, DENISE NICHOLAS, GORDON PINSENT, PAM GRIER, DOM MITCHELL / DATE OF RELEASE: OCTOBER 27TH

When the 'blaxploitation' genre exploded in the 1970s – 'black exploitation' films ostensibly aimed at a black urban audience (but which actually reached out to a far broader church) – it was inevitable that super cool titles like Shaft and Superfly would lead to studios chasing after a slice of the always profitable horror film pie. Blacula appeared in 1972, an extraordinary footnote to the story of Dracula on the big screen. It might well have appeared bold and audacious in the 1970s but in 2014 Blacula just looks fantastically dated and sensationally ill-judged and clumsy, an amusing title in search of a decent film.

Visiting Castle Dracula in 1780, Prince Mamuwalde (Marshall) and his wife Luva (McGee) fall foul of the vampire lord's bloodlust when Dracula refuses to assist the prince in his fight against the slave trade. Bitten and imprisoned in a coffin, Mamuwalde wakes up in Los Angeles in 1972 (the timeshift never remotely bothers him); after slaughtering two ludicrously stereotyped camp interior decorators, Mamuwalde stalks the streets of Los Angeles in search of Tina Williams who, as luck would have it, is a dead ringer for his long-dead wife.

Racial and sexual stereotypes aside, Blacula is lightweight fun, its shonky production values and inelegant action sequences shored up by the powerful and commanding presence of Marshall as the titular vampire. Blacula is more avuncular than animalistic and whilst the film's plot occasionally mirrors the plot of Stoker's Dracula novel, it more often goes its own way and its funky, bass-heavy incidental music is in itself a thing of joy.

1973's sequel Scream, Blacula, Scream is a more accomplished and confident affair – but oddly much less fun. Marshall's vampire is much more feral here and the whole film is gutsier and more assured, with better direction from newcomer Kelljan. Mamuwalde (he finally – and rather ludicrously – calls himself 'Blacula' at the end of the film) ingratiates himself with a group of squabbling voodoo practitioners in the hope that their rituals can rid him of the 'demon' within him which has made him a vampire. And he would have gotten away with it too, if it wasn't for… oh, never mind.

Never have the words 'a product of their time' seemed more appropriate than in relation to the Blacula films. Produced at a period when Hollywood was finally starting to recognise the importance and profile of the black audience, they now appear a little patronising and heavy-handed. Blacula looks bright and shiny in its new Blu-ray transfer (particularly in its daytime sequences) but the sequel is noticeably grainier. Both films are worth a look for Marshall's fruity cod-Shakespearean tones alone; just don't expect anything with the bite even of one of Hammer's tamer 1960s efforts.

Extras: Introduction by Kim Newman / Trailers / Booklet

PAUL MOUNT

++++++++++ 6

RED SHIFT

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTED: JOHN MACKENZIE / SCREENPLAY: ALAN GARNER / STARRING: STEPHEN PETCHER, LESLEY DUNLOP, MYRA FRANCES, JAMES HAZELDINE, MICHAEL ELPHICK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Based on Cheshire-born author Alan Garner's 1973 children's novel, 1978's television adaptation of Red Shift was one of the rare forays into 'fantasy' from the BBC's single drama Play For Today strand which ran from 1970 to 1984. It's a story which takes place across three different time periods and its three male protagonists are all troubled young men whose fates and destinies seem to be entwined with the fate of an old axe-head which has survived across the centuries and been inadvertently passed down between them. But there's no outlandish time travel here, no meeting of minds across the centuries - just an irresistible sense of history repeating itself in the lives of three men separated by the ages.

Tom (Petcher) and Jan (Dunlop) are two contemporary youngsters being pulled in opposite directions. Tom is a romantic dreamer; Jan is ambitious and about to head off to University. Macey (Andrew Byatt) and his fellow Roman soldiers are disorientated deserters and they slaughter the inhabitants of a stockaded village and capture, imprison and abuse a young girl. In the time of the English Civil War, Thomas Rowley (Charles Bolton) and his wife are living quietly when their village is besieged by royalist soldiers in search of traitorous village leader John Fowler (Hazeldine). The thread that binds the stories of the three men is Macey's buried axe-head, exhumed by Fowley and dubbed a "thunderstone" and later found by Tom and Jan where Fowley had secreted it centuries before.

By 1978 BBC standards, Red Shift is a sprawling, ambitious production. It may seem stilted and dated to modern eyes - ironically it's the 1978 sequences, with Tom and Jan and their terribly pretentious relationship and Tom's stuffy, repressed parents, which look more antiquated than the Roman and Civil War recreations. The latter are surprisingly vivid and realistic, studded with sharp and brutal violence and with a real sense of short lives lived violently. The three central characters share a dreamy wistfulness which subtly suggests their unspoken connection across the years, brought together by the axe-head and their proximity to the location of the village of Mow Cop and its overlooking ruined 18th century castle. Macey, Thomas and Tom are bound as much by where they lived their lives as the way they lived them and the axe-head which passes into and through the lives ties them together without any of them ever knowing that the others have existed or will exist.

Red Shift is a compelling and contemplative drama, typical of Garner's tradition of light fantasy tales derived from and permeated with the traditions and values of classic British folk lore. His stories are about places and history as much as people - his best-known work is probably the disturbing Owl Service, which became a memorable 1969 children's series on ITV. Red Shift is oddly haunting and a little disquieting and this beautiful new transfer from the BFI more than does justice to a film which, like much of Garner's output, is utterly distinctive and original.

Extras: *Souvenir booklet / Alan Garner documentary / 20-minute Cheshire travelogue / Interviews*

PAUL MOUNT

7

SHARKNADO 2: THE SECOND ONE

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ANTHONY C. FERRANTE / SCREENPLAY: THUNDER LEVIN / STARRING: IAN ZIERING, TARA REID, VIVICA A. FOX, MARK MCGRATH, KARI WUHRER / OCTOBER 27TH

After years of peddling cheap schlock and shameless cash-in movies, The Asylum hit gold last year when they created the cult phenomenon that was Sharknado. Pulling record high viewing figures for the company when it aired on Syfy, a sequel was a certainty.

So inevitably, we find ourselves at Sharknado 2: The Second One, a film that proved to be even more popular than the first. The plot (for want of a better word) sees Ziering and Reid head to New York for a book signing. Sure enough, it's not long before sharks start showing up and mayhem ensues. The rest of the film plays out like the New York attack from Avengers Assemble, but with sharks instead of Chitauri (there's even an Avengers-esque post credit sting).

There's a certain enjoyment that comes from watching a bad movie, and Sharknado 2 is a bad movie. It's also incredibly good fun to watch, especially if you're watching it with friends who enjoy bantering along to the movie with you (or if you don't, watch it and then listen to the How Did This Get Made Sharknado 2 podcast instead).

There is a genuine enjoyment that comes from watching a film that doesn't know it's bad, that is different to watching a film that is deliberately made to be bad, but with the Sharknado films, The Asylum seems to have deliberately made bad films that are genuinely enjoyable, largely because for the first time, everyone is in on the joke.

There are some fun movie references and in-jokes to spot, plus a bunch of celebrity cameos (some you'll get and some you won't – unless you're really up on your American pop culture). That said, some of the cameos make little sense beyond just having a (borderline) famous face in the role while others are missed opportunities (Daymond John from Shark Tank – the US Dragon's Den – for example).

Overall then, the acting is terrible, the special effects look like they came right out of a 1990s' sci-fi show and the story seems to have been written in 10 minutes on the back of a Shawarma restaurant napkin; yet still, it's recommended viewing. It's the very definition of a "switch your brain off and just enjoy yourself" type movie and has no pretentions within itself that it is anything more than that. Which is oddly refreshing! The honest, 'is it any good' film rating would be 3/10; however, our final score comes from pure enjoyment. This is really, what these films are all about.

STUART MULRAIN

7

KITE

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: RALPH ZIMAN / SCREENPLAY: BRIAN COX / STARRING: SAMUEL L. JACKSON, INDIA EISLEY, CALLAN MCAULIFFE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

"*Why have a conversation when you can stab someone, eh?*" says Callan McAauliffe's character Oburi to India Eisley's Sawa (pronounced after Kurosawa) towards the end of Kite, and that would seem to be a manifesto for the movie. Shot in a washed-out palette punctuated by stark instances of vivid colour, Kite is scant on dialogue and characterisation and big on atmosphere, peppered with frequent moments of ferocious violence. It is an uncomfortably brutal viewing experience.

Based on the two-part Japanese anime from the same year as the film Blade, with which this live-action remake appreciably shares both an environment and an ambience, Ralph Ziman's film (Ziman joined the project after originally slated director David R. Ellis died in 2013) takes its cue from the more easily digestible graphic novel milieu, its plot basically being an expanded variation on the Hit-Girl sub-plot from Kick-Ass, with something of the feel of similarly nihilistic and femme-centric movies like Sucker Punch informing its presentation. Set in an unnamed near-future cityscape (and shot in Johannesburg, as indicated by the accents of the supporting cast), Kite tones down many of the more unpalatable elements of the original, streamlining the plot for Western audiences without condescending to the mainstream.

Sawa, whose family were killed during a gangland attack several years previously, has teamed up with her father's ex-partner, detective Karl Aker (Jackson), to track down and enact revenge upon the so-called "Numbers" who had caused her parents' deaths. Edgily directed and uncompromisingly bloodthirsty, we join the story just as Sawa begins to cut loose from Aker's influence and increasingly take matters into her own hands. With little or no humour to alleviate the grimness, it is up to Sawa's contemporary Oburi to bring some humanity into her world. There is little that is unpredictable about what follows, but the manner in which it plays out is nevertheless compelling, and the focus is – with good reason – more on Sawa's deliberately drug-suppressed memories than it is on the complexities of her mission. The central performances are generally effective if sometimes a little monotonous.

Fleshed out with the kind of variable acting that somehow seems appropriate to a movie of this nature, Kite balances its kineticism with numerous occasions of the utmost stillness, and finds a rhythm to suit both its plot and its concerns. The soundtrack matches that mood beat for beat, although the film's spartan universe and bleak perspective won't make it easy viewing for anyone seeking out something more conventional. For anyone with an affinity for the darker territories that modern comics commonly inhabit, this is no instant classic; however, it is an immersive and largely satisfying production. A film to appreciate rather than one to like.

Extras: *Trailer*

J.R. SOUTHALL

7

GRAVE HALLOWEEN

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: STEVEN R. MONROE / SCREENPLAY: RYAN W. SMITH / STARRING: KAITLYN LEEB, CASSI THOMSON, DEJAN LOYOLA, GRAHAM WARDLE / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 27TH

You pretty much always know what you're going to get with a Syfy channel movie. It'll be wise to the rules of its genre and have something ridiculously weird but somehow entertaining happen every ten minutes, but ultimately it will fall apart if the script or performances are at all scrutinised. It would be great to say Grave Halloween departs from that mould. But it doesn't.

From I Spit on Your Grave director (and all-round fan of the word 'grave') Steven R. Monroe, Grave Halloween follows – stop us if you've heard this one before – a group of shockingly attractive young students who venture into the deep, dark woods to make a documentary about a dead person. The woods in question are Japan's Aokigahara, a notorious suicide hotspot, and the corpse in question is the mother of Maiko (Leeb). She wants to give her mother, who topped herself when Maiko was a child, the ritual burial she deserves, while allowing Amber (Thomson) to film it for a college project.

"Damn, if only I'd thought of exploiting my friend's childhood trauma to get me through school", you'll probably be thinking. That, or, "Ah shit, not another found footage movie" – but Grave Halloween isn't quite that. The film intercuts the group's documentary footage with more traditionally shot scenes – a wise choice that allows Monroe the freedom to craft a spine-chilling atmosphere and to cut away to other people, mostly so we can see them die horrifically. Yes, this is a film which knows how to raise hairs, particularly in its dark and troublesome climax.

The problem is, when the film slows down between scary bits, you're at risk of accidentally thinking about the plot, and that's when it all goes downhill. There's little consistency as to what's actually going on – it's a ghost story, but at one point a guy's attacked by evil trees. Not sure why. And we're no experts on the Japanese justice system, but it's unlikely common practice for arrested thieves to be handcuffed to a shelf in a morgue.

What's worse is that, Maiko's determination to bury her mother aside, the characters are sorely underwritten. In the opening sequences, Loyola's Terry is introduced as the easy-going, 'everything-will-be-fine' member of the gang, and Wardle's Kyle is tipped as the new guy whom the others can't yet trust, but neither of these characteristics are at all returned to once they get into the woods. Actually, considering the quality of acting on show, maybe it's for the best that they don't have to bother with depth…

Grave Halloween may not stand up to much analysis, but if shockingly attractive students and the horrifying murders of the aforesaid are the kind of thing you like – well, there are worse ways to spend a night.

KIERON MOORE

4

AFFLICTED

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DEREK LEE, CLIF PROWSE / STARRING: DEREK LEE, CLIF PROWSE, MICHAEL GILL, BAYA REHAZ / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Singing from the same vampiric hymn sheet as Del Toro's The Strain, Afflicted takes vampirism back to its plague-like roots on screen, established by F.W. Murnau's Nosferatu. It is no spoiler to mention the fanged fiends, as after a while you have an idea just what affliction the film concerns and, despite the hesitation many may approach the film with upon hearing it is a found footage film, Afflicted is a fang-tastic offering and well worth seeking out.

The plot sees best friends Derek and Clif set out on a round the world trip and aim to document and upload their journey online. However, after a few days, an encounter with a female in Paris leaves Derek injured. He makes a speedy recovery, however, but begins to show signs that all is not right with his body and mind. Afflicted may indeed boast a familiar set-up, but with the saturation of the genre that is to be expected, and once Derek's unfortunate romantic experience occurs, the film really kicks into full-blooded gear. Lee and Prowse are clearly passionate about the genres they are covering, and their film, with any luck, will be discovered as a shining example of why there is still life in the found-footage film yet. Afflicted is a superbly well made film, with sympathetic characters and a tone akin to Chronicle, Rec 2 and in some small ways Cronenberg's The Fly.

The whole issue of "why keep filming" is well explained and used to power the plot, which is (for the most part) pacey and intelligent. For instance, where most films would showcase such events undeterred by the real world, Afflicted has the brain to realise that such occurrences would draw the attention and focus of the police. Lee and Prowse essentially play themselves onscreen, and that blurring of reality makes for a playful companion to the more fantastical gory horror beats and occasional chase thrills. The shooting is intuitive and the POV chase sequences astoundingly captured, and while the film does build slowly into things (and not without a certain amount of clichés), the payoff is worthwhile and entertaining.

Afflicted is a superbly made piece of found-footage horror with realistic effects and make-up, and while it is not always frightening, the story is enticing enough to see play out. Considering the rather underwhelming state of modern mainstream horror, a film like Afflicted is further proof that the best the genre has to offer can be found on the independent circuit. Afflicted is gruesome, entertaining and well acted by its newly debuting (for a full feature film) writer/actor/director duo Prowse and Lee, who have a great amount of potential based on this evidence. Afflicted is rough around the edges but excellent, interspersed with strong leads, action, and astoundingly good use of budget. If that post-credits scene is indeed teasing a sequel then you will find no complaints coming from us. If you want it in short, Afflicted is bloody good.

Extras: *A conversation with the actors/directors / Audio commentary with directors*

JACK BOTTOMLEY

8

KIDNAPPED

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: MIGUEL ÁNGEL VIVAS / SCREENPLAY: JAVIER GARCIA, MIGUEL ÁNGEL VIVAS / STARRING: FERNANDO CAYO, MANUELLA VELLÉS, ANA WAGENER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There are some films that you really only need to see once. Kidnapped, a home invasion thriller that starts out nasty, before descending into downright vicious, is one such movie.

A simple story of a family moving into their brand new lush home soon turns to bloodshed and slaughter as three balaclava-clad men burst into their lives to make some quick money. Jaime, Marta and daughter Isa are just getting to grips with their luxurious new pad when the hooded burglars smash their way into the house and proceed to demand money. Quickly cast aside are tensions between mother and daughter, suddenly replaced by a gut-churning night of survival as one of the armed men takes Jaime out to a cash point to collect as much money from the family's cards as they can. But as things go from bad to worse, it becomes clear these robbers are not going to stop at just taking their money.

After an extraordinary opening scene involving a man with a bloodied bag over his head stumbling through the woods and then having a very near miss with a speeding car, it swiftly becomes clear that director Miguel Ángel Vivas likes a long take. The camera glides and prowls around this film like it is attached to the shoulders of characters, giving a more immersive feeling than any number of found footage horror films could ever attempt to muster. Kidnapped is actually comprised of very few shots for a feature, and the camera sticks to these characters like glue, making for some uncomfortable viewing.

To make things even more unbearably tense, Vivas employs split screens for key scenes where action comes to a head. It is riveting, edge of the seat stuff, and despite the lack of characterisation or complex plot, Kidnapped is one hell of a visceral thrill ride. Relentlessly grim, brutal and with little in the way of catharsis, it is a difficult watch at times with some shockingly graphic violence. Let's just say that once some sexual violence rears its ugly head, the gloves really come off!

While Kidnapped may add little to the home invasion thriller that hasn't already been seen in the likes of Straw Dogs or Panic Room, its style is exceptional and Vivas doesn't hold back as he heads towards the vicious climax. With a camera that rarely cuts, and often sits static on the faces of victims in despair, the performances are necessarily outstanding. Manuela Vellés and Ana Wagener are particularly magnetic; their faces fraught with fear and their screams an almost constant soundtrack of terror.

There are plenty of familiar beats with unexpected intrusions adding to the body count and tensions arising between the kidnappers, but what makes Kidnapped so special isn't its story or characterisation but its style and ultra violence. Considering there is little time to get to know these characters, it is the impressive camerawork, editing and committed performances that make this film so disturbing. Its unrelenting torment is the kind of thing you will probably only wish to witness once, but Kidnapped is definitely a film that locks you in and refuses to let you go.

PETER TURNER

8

EDGE OF TOMORROW

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: DOUG LIMAN / SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER MCQUARRIE, JEZ BUTTERWORTH, JOHN-HENRY BUTTERWORTH / STARRING: TOM CRUISE, EMILY BLUNT, BRENDAN GLEESON, BILL PAXTON, TONY WAY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hollywood's current approach to sci-fi is to add a novel element into the plot. It is not enough to have a simple space opera or futuristic war; the whole thing has to revolve around some clever and mind-bending twist. Edge of Tomorrow's gimmick is that the main character is doomed to repeat the same day again and again. Unlike Groundhog Day however, the day the protagonist is doomed to repeat is the day that mankind loses to a powerful alien invasion force.

The plot is anything but simple. Earth is at war with an implacable alien menace known as the Mimic. Tom Cruise plays the photogenic Major Cage, a PR man who has spent his military career avoiding active service by being the smiling face of military recruitment. When Cage's luck and charm run out, he finds himself on the front. His first encounter causes him to become cursed with an ever-repeating day, and he swiftly works out that his only path to victory is to ally with Emily Blunt's character, a woman he had previously been hyping to the media as 'The Angel of Verdun'.

The result is a high-octane alien invasion action movie in which you get to see Tom Cruise die many, many times. For some, this is worth the price of the DVD alone. The movie looks appropriately gritty and at points has a very First Person Shooter video game feel. This effect is only heightened by the fact that Cruise has seemingly infinite replays. The aliens are very well done, being mostly a mass of tentacles mixed with molten lava. This contrasts with the soldiers' power-suits very nicely indeed, allowing for really eye-popping special effects whilst still maintaining some suspension of disbelief.

The DVD release only contains limited extras for some reason. Weapons of The Future and Creatures Not of this World are fairly standard insights into the movie-making process and don't really add to the experience. Additional extras have been added to the Blu-ray, presumably to encourage you to start using that format.

Edge of Tomorrow would have been a solid and interesting sci-fi movie without its time-warping premise. With it, it becomes something much deeper and more entertaining. Though the movie wastes a lot of its potential in favour of clever action sequences, this does seem to be a worthwhile trade-off. If you ever wondered what the love child of Aliens and Groundhog Day would look like, then this could well be your answer.

ED FORTUNE

7

BAD MILO

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JACOB VAUGHAN / SCREENPLAY: BENJAMIN HAYES, JACOB VAUGHAN / STARRING: KEN MARINO, GILLIAN JACOBS, PATRICK WARBURTON, PETER STORMARE / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

Ever notice how, every so often, movies come along that defy film criticism? Films that cannot be awarded marks and that simply work or not? Well, say hello to Bad Milo. Here is a film that is many things but(t) by the book is not one of them. So feast your eyes on this cheek-clenching concept that Vaughn wields with gross glee. This film sees stressed accountant Duncan (Marino), struggling with stomach pains, but what is diagnosed as stress turns out to be a literal pain in the arse, in the shape of stress demon Milo, who has grown and taken refuge in Duncan's anus and emerges to attack anybody who contributes to his master's anxiety. Like Cockneys vs. Zombies or Zombeavers, this is a film that in concept alone (good or bad) is a must-see!

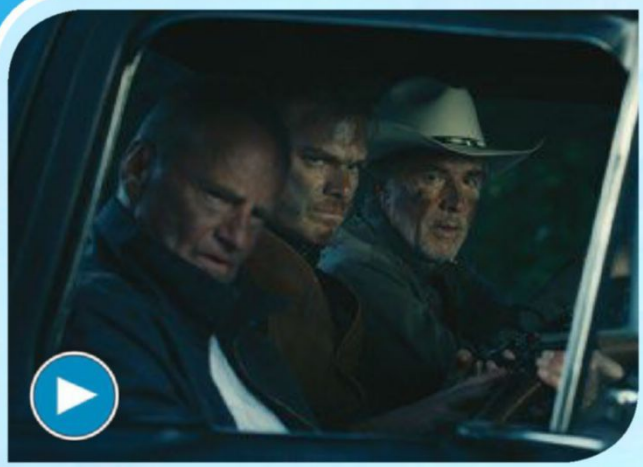
But stay with us, because this is actually a rather affectionate little film in its own demented way and while it misses out on matching its inspirations, it certainly pays them tribute. Vaughan's film is full of gross-out humour (from penis biting to rats up the 'arris) and while some of this isn't necessarily hilarious, it is a uniquely different film, which rewards fans of the '80s creature features. Inspired by films like Gremlins, Basket Case and Critters, this is a throwback to the bygone B-Movie days, where nasty little buggers caused chaos and people loved it. The decision to minimise the CGI for practical effects and puppetry proves to be another successful nostalgic beat and one of the film's strongest suits - the rendering of Milo himself - is a keen balance of butt ugly (sorry) and oddly cute.

The script doesn't have the meatiness of the genre's best efforts and the all round lack of sophistication wears thin come the climax. Indeed a little bit of some of the gags go a long way (Duncan's mum and her active sex life especially). That said, if you paid to see an arse demon run amok, you won't be disappointed, just don't go expecting the rounded appeal of Joe Dante. Bad Milo has a lot of inexplicable charm to it (much like its rancid title character) and even if it occasionally thinks itself funnier than it is, Vaughn's movie is a pleasing homage.

Ted Masur's music sets the tone right from the offset and is reminiscent (in its purposefully grandiose nature) of Michael Wandmacher's score for (the superior) Piranha 3D. Luckily the cast are in on the joke, with Ken Marino excelling most in the lead role as Duncan. Meanwhile Patrick Warburton is the 'douchey' boss Phil and Peter Stormare is clearly having a right laugh as mad psychiatrist Highsmith. It is a shame the plot turns a bit too excessive come the central twist and that it wastes Gillian Jacobs but there is still fun to be had with Bad Milo, which is not rear of the year material but nor is it a bum note either (we'll stop now).

JACK BOTTOMLEY

7



COLD IN JULY

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JIM MICKLE / SCREENPLAY: NICK DAMICI, JIM MICKLE / STARRING: MICHAEL C. HALL, VINESSA SHAW, DON JOHNSON, SAM SHEPARD / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

Cold in July is the fourth and best cinematic offering from director Jim Mickle and his regular co-writer Frank Damici. Their previous works, particularly the apocalyptic Stake Land and the bizarrely touching We Are What We Are, hinted strongly that this was a creative pair on the ascendant, and Cold in July is the film where everything comes together.

Based on the novel by genre-bending Joe R. Lansdale (you might know his work from other adaptations such as Bubba Ho-Tep and the Masters of Horror episode, Incident On and Off a Mountain Road), Cold in July is astoundingly faithful to the spirit of its source material. Set in 1989, this is a film that oozes '80s cinematic nostalgia from its synth score to its subdued neo-noir pacing.

The film starts with a home break-in that ends fatally for the burglar, as home owner and family man Richard Dane (Hall) shoots the intruder. From that moment he's hailed as a hero, but that does little to quell his feelings of guilt for taking a life. Things take a turn for the worse when the dead man's father comes into town. He waves at Richard from across the street as Richard collects his son from school, he stands at the foot of the bed and watches Richard's son sleep, and just as you think you know what direction the film is taking, it takes a sharp turn onto Bizarre Street. The film plays on your expectations of genre cinema with recognisable tropes such as organised crime and police corruption, and a truly horrific depiction of pornography, but then it zigzags its way across the lush East Texas landscape to its explosive and blood soaked conclusion.

Fans of Dexter will revel in Hall's measured depiction of mild-mannered Richard Dane, who grudgingly accepts that in order to protect his family he will have to turn his back on all his values and beliefs. Sam Shepard plays a calmly aggrieved Ben Russell, the father of the shot intruder, in a chillingly patient style. You can't help but wonder just when the BOO! moment will come and all his fury is let loose. But the act that really steals the show is Don Johnson as P.I. Jim Bob Luke who's so Texan that his bright cherry red Cadillac's hood ornament is a pair of long horns. He's a character that once he starts he'll see it through, no matter how tough it gets.

Mickle recently announced that he was developing Lansdale's Hap Collins and Leonard Pine novels for television. If that series is as well-crafted and as respectful to the books as Cold in July, then we're all in for a Southern-fried treat.

CHRISTIAN JONES

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WRONG TURN 6: LAST RESORT

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: VALERI MILEV / SCREENPLAY: FRANK H. WOODWARD / STARRING: SADIE KATZ, ANTHONY ILOTT, AQUEELA ZOLL / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

Wait, Wrong Turn 6, you say? Against all odds, the critic-proof hillbilly franchise returns, this time riffing on Texas Chainsaw 3D for a steamy tale of lust, heritage and kissing cousins. For the first time, the series' inbreeding is brought to the fore as troubled orphan Danny discovers a hitherto unknown inheritance, buried deep in the Appalachian mountains: his very own spa resort, run by creepy caretakers Sally and Jackson. Is all as it seems, or is something a little more sinister afoot? Well, six films in, you should have a pretty good idea by now.

At this point, everyone should know exactly what to expect from a Wrong Turn film – heaps of gore, lashings of nudity and an often uncomfortable meeting of the two during the kill sequences. Wrong Turn 6 (6!) doesn't disappoint in that respect, being the most sexed-up entry in the franchise so far. Remarkably, however, it manages to do so without feeling even nearly as rapey and unpleasant as its immediate predecessor. Doug Bradley is nowhere to be seen this time around; Sally and Jackson are the outwardly normal parent figures, making it anyone's guess as to where that leaves the timeline. Well played by Chris Jarvis and Sadie Katz, the pair ensure that the bored, coasting Bradley isn't missed at all. Elsewhere, Three Finger and his mutie siblings remain on the outside of the action, taking a slightly more reduced role but turning up any time things threaten to take a turn for the dull.

No fear of that, not with the bizarre story, odd casting choices (hello, Roxanne Pallett from Emmerdale, doing nudity and an American accent) and shocking violence. The series has always been famed for its inventive gore sequences, and Wrong Turn 6 certainly doesn't let the side down. There's enough here to rival even the fourth film's grotesque fondue scene; which, for the uninitiated, is really saying something. It looks remarkably good too, considering how late we are into the game, and how shoddy and cheap the last film was. The spa resort and surrounding woodlands (actually filmed in Bulgaria) are a neat setting, giving kids and hillbilly alike plenty of room to run about, be it in search of nooky or salvation. For all the snootiness and disdain one could direct towards the series, you have to give director Valeri Milev and writer Frank H. Woodward credit for not simply resting on their laurels with a lazy rehash of the first film. If anything, this is one of the best entries yet. Of course, Wrong Turn 6 won't be for everyone – it's crude, cruel and creepy, packed full of the various nasty tricks the franchise has accrued over the years. This one will win the series no new fans. Those of us who have been there from the beginning, however, should love it. And, yes, it leaves the door wedged wide open for a(nother) sequel.

JOEL HARLEY

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ARROW: THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: STEPHEN AMELL, MANU BENNETT, EMILY BETT RICKARDS, DAVID RAMSAY, CAITY LOTZ / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Whilst the first season of The CW's Arrow was good, this second year made for some truly stunning television. In the aftermath of Malcolm Merlyn's "undertaking" scheme, Oliver Queen (Amell) is doing his best to support the rebuilding of Starling City whilst also whooping the bad guys in his other job. Now known as The Arrow, Queen has to fight his way through a slew of familiar DC faces, such as The Clock King, Dollmaker, Count Vertigo, Brother Blood, Cyrus Gold, and Nyssa al Ghul. But it's with one-time bestest bud Slade Wilson (Bennett) that The Emerald Archer starts to have serious problems. During the show's island flashbacks, we find Wilson under the influence of mirakuru, a serum that increases his strength, speed, and aggression while making him near invincible and a little unhinged. As Slade loses his grip on sanity, he blames Oliver for the death of his 'one true,' putting in motion a plan of revenge that culminates in modern-day Starling City and with the aim of destroying Ollie and those closest to him.

Season Two of Arrow has so much going on, but the key is the pacing and the execution of its storytelling. The main arc is most definitely Slade's ascension to the Deathstroke moniker, mirrored with Oliver's growth from mere reckless vigilante to full-on hero who operates with a code, but there are so many subtle, intriguing subplots strewn throughout the season. We get to see Sara Lance (Lotz) return from the grave and become The Canary, Moira Quinn (Susanna Thompson) take on Sebastian 'Brother' Blood (Kevin Alejandro) for the Mayor of Starling City position, and Oliver take the troubled Roy Harper (Colton Haynes) under his wing. Then there's the expanded trust between Oliver, Felicity (Rickards) and Diggle (Ramsay), the attack on Queen Consolidated by Isabelle Rochev (Summer Glau), mirakuru-ravaged soldiers on the streets of Starling City, The League of Assassins, Amanda Waller (Cynthia Addai-Robinson) and her Suicide Squad, and there's a whole host more and the introduction of the freakin' Flash (Grant Gustin)! To sum up such a crammed series in a concise review almost seems criminal.

Whereas there's a whole lot going on in Season Two, the fractured relationship between former 'brothers' Oliver and Slade is brilliant to watch develop, particularly with the modern-day Wilson always being once step ahead of his former protégé. Whilst Manu Bennett simmers perfectly as Slade, Stephen Amell has gotten to the stage where the whole Arrow character fits him like a second skin. Natural, fluid, immersive, genuine, and emotive, Amell, much like Arrow itself, hits it out of the park here. Additionally, with a supporting cast of characters that have been so wonderfully developed the show can survive extensive time without its central hero, it really does feel like the minds behind Arrow have truly crafted something special.

Simply put, in terms of must-see television, Arrow clinically hits the bullseye.

Extras: *Three featurettes / Select episode commentaries / Deleted scenes / Gag reel.*

ANDREW POLLARD

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THE CROW: STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN - THE COMPLETE SERIES

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: MARK DACASCOS, MARC GOMES, SABINE KARSENTI, KATIE STUART/ RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This late '90s TV series is finally released on DVD after initially airing in the UK on The Sci-Fi Channel (as it was) at the turn of the millennium. Over 22 episodes, we're given an expanded story centred on Eric Draven (Dacascos). After he and girlfriend Shelly (Karsenti) are murdered, Draven returns from the grave a year later in order to gain revenge. As the series progresses, the story becomes more about redemption and helping others who have been wronged, all whilst Draven looks for a way to be reunited with his soul mate. Often assisting him are well-meaning cop Albrecht (Gomes) and tough street kid Sarah (Stuart).

Just to throw it out there: no, this isn't up to the standard of the classic Brandon Lee-starring movie... but it really isn't that bad either. With the first two episodes essentially retelling a lot of that 1994 movie, including use of some of its score, the series then goes off on its own path. Given how this version of The Crow was aimed at a TV audience, there are obvious differences to any of the four movies that we've seen over the years. In fairness, there are some moments that are more tied to James O'Barr's original graphic novel than the first movie, but then there are confines that the show has to work within in terms of language, violence, and certain adult themes. The show doesn't suffer for those and it actually adapts rather well to these limitations.

Often more spiritual than some of the Crow movies that you may have seen, this series still amps up the action but relies more on well-choreographed sequences to make up for a lack of extreme violence and bloodshed. Central to all of this is Dacascos as Eric Draven. The martial artist-turned-actor steps up to the plate remarkably well in the role made famous by the sadly-deceased Lee, bringing a likeable charm to his wronged former rock star and revelling in the sarcastic quips that he gets to spit out; acting as tragic lover, big brother, partner, and a hand of justice at various points. Whilst some of the dialogue and action is a little cheesy at times, Dacascos often winds it in just enough to make it enjoyable.

Away from the central lead, the show has some decent SFX for the time, even if they may look a little dated these days, and the supporting performances from the likes of Gomes, Karsenti and young Katie Stuart are all solid and delivered in line with the tone of the show. As a show, there's really a bit of everything here, including some continuing threads throughout the series and regular villain-of-the-week types to go up against Draven, with character development and continuity used wisely.

Viewed through neutral eyes, Stairway to Heaven is a good series that was annoyingly cut short and left on a cliff-hanger. Despite some obvious dating, helped non-by the aspect ratio and video quality of the release, the show stands up reasonably well and is a worthy addition to the collection of any fans of The Crow.

Extras: *Audio commentary / Gag reel / Production dailies / Stills gallery and series description / Original score / Cast and crew biographies / Collectors' Series guide booklet*

ANDREW POLLARD

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GHOST IN THE SHELL (1995)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MAMORU OSHII / SCREENPLAY: KAZUNORI ITÔ / STARRING: ATSUKO TANAKA, AKIO ÔTSUKA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To coincide with the 25th anniversary of Masamune Shirow's seminal cyberpunk manga series, Ghost in the Shell has been given an HD overhaul and released on Blu-ray. A product of the anarchic digital age of the late '80s and early '90s, the techno-punk of code and internet access, Ghost in the Shell followed in the wake of Akira to profoundly impact pop culture, positively changing Western views of Japanese animation. Its effect, some 19 years later, is still keenly felt, from The Matrix to the novels of William Gibson and, more recently, Wally Pfister's Transcendence.

Directed by Mamoru Oshii and penned by one of the finest voices in anime, Kazunori Itô, Ghost in the Shell is set in 2029 and follows Motoko, a cyborg operative of Section 9 – an elite security agency which deals with counter-terrorism and cyber crime. The agency is put on the case of the notorious hacker Puppet Master, who has been infiltrating the brains of innocent people in order to make them his accomplices. Motoko is quickly embroiled in a clandestine mix of futurist musings and real world concerns.

The source material is undoubtedly inspired by Ridley Scott's Blade Runner, with concerns such as the fallibility of memory and the existential musings of identity, but Ghost in the Shell exists very much in its own right. It is steeped in the subject of sentience, artificial or otherwise – how birth is merely an issue of context, of definition, and what humanity actually means.

With hacking, viruses and the illegal acquisition of private information all now commonplace, the storyline is even more relevant in 2014 than it was in the '90s. Indeed, the speculative elements (integration with machinery, computerisation, implanted memories, etc) are more of a nightmarish peek into the immediate future rather than straight-out science fiction.

The animation is still visually dynamic and exciting, more so with this evocative remaster. The 3D elements in particular hold up to scrutiny, with the dizzyingly detailed city shots and the sequences of Motoko's 'birth' as sublime and ambitious as any additions to the genre over the last two decades.

Kenji Kawai's score is gorgeous, the main theme incorporating elements of traditional Japanese minyo chanting, coupled with the tones of the classical Japanese music scale, culminating in a haunting effect.

Ghost in the Shell remains a striking, breathtaking and culturally relevant film. Motoko is firmly cemented as one of the most iconic characters of sci-fi, up there with Ellen Ripley. While the remakes or subsequent sequel and series have helped flesh out the multifaceted world of Ghost in the Shell, the original remains the most vital.

Extras: *Booklet*

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

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MOBY DICK

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MIKE BARKER / SCREENPLAY: NIGEL WILLIAMS / STARRING: ETHAN HAWKE, WILLIAM HURT, EDDIE MARSAN, CHARLIE COX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Whilst this star-crammed 2011 miniseries cannot match the best versions of the story, in its own right it is a watchably righteous tale of man's obsession with conquering the biggest titan of nature.

Across 3 hours the story may have its lesser stretches and the alterations to the source text will infuriate lovers of the literature but Moby Dick does capture the grand, overpowering, essence of this tragic tale. From the rather doom-laden tones of the Chaigley Symphony Orchestra score to the impressive set design, this IS as much condensed disaster movie as it is literary adaptation. From the offset it is clear that liberties are taken, with the altered story of young black character Pip (played here by Daniyah Ysrayl) being one of many various tweaks. In fact, this version of the story skips over the intricacy of the whaling industry exploits and the full depth of this American era covered. Yet it does not quite exclude the religious, social and prejudicial themes - even if there is more action than contemplation.

Moby Dick is slightly overlong at moments but ultimately builds to a fittingly grand climax and while there is no denying how much has been extracted and condensed, the fundamentals are there to enjoy. Certain characters do not quite get the chance to shine, for instance many of the crew, with the notable exceptions of Eddie Marsan's Mr Stubb and Raoul Trujillo's Queequeg, are reduced to little more than regular faces and voices, chiming in on the conflicts of the ship's upper management. There is no doubt that there was a wealth of material to translate and sadly this miniseries has not evaluated as many characters as it could have - Donald Sutherland's Father Mapple and Gillian Anderson's Elizabeth especially. That said, credit must be given to the impressive cast, who really give meat to their parts and this classic story.

The series' main flaw is that Ishmael (the book's narrator and main character) is less interesting than some of the other lead characters; still Charlie Cox gives a respectable performance. Though the bellowing William Hurt as the obsessed-come-insane Captain Ahab is perhaps most notable and Ethan Hawke delivers an equally memorable turn as perhaps (come the end) the only right-minded crew member, Mr Starbuck. Moby Dick has its share of strange decisions and alterations but there is no doubt that some of the intensity of the material being adapted is on display. Despite the usual TV flaw of jarring special effects and visuals, the series has some keen visual graces. It also creates an imposing and effective Moby Dick for the characters to face and, like Honda's Godzilla or Wallace/Cooper's King Kong, Moby Dick is treated as a cultural icon of nature's prowess. Indeed, more depth and less source material trimming may have made for a better adaptation, and this may sour the experience for those with an adoration of the text. That said, and for all the flaws, there is a highly watchable two-part drama here. One that unfolds and tells a story that may be familiar and condensed but still retains a powerful and emotional edge, even if this is more "Call me Ahab" than "Call me Ishmael".

JACK BOTTOMLEY

7

STAGEFRIGHT (1987)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: MICHELE SOAVI / SCREENPLAY: GEORGE EASTMAN, SHEILA GOLDBERG / STARRING: DAVID BRANDON, BARBARA CUPISTI, GIOVANNI LOMBARDO RADICE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

An oft-forgotten relic from the height of the video age, StageFright (or StageFright: Aquarius as it's sometimes known) gets a welcome uncut reissue in HD courtesy of Exposure Cinema, and it's a package well worth checking out!

As emotions at the rehearsals for a musical stage production called The Night Owl, in which the murderer wears a large owl's head, get strained, an escaped killer (who just so happens to be an actor who went crazy and massacred his fellow thespians) gate-crashes the theatre, locking them all in, and proceeds to pop them off one-by-one. Wearing the grotesque owl-head costume of the leading man, the murderer chops, slashes, drills, and decapitates the troupe, while those still living attempt to escape.

It's a fairly standard slasher set-up, but the addition of a number of things raises StageFright above the mediocre. The first is obvious; the instantly creepy and memorable costume the killer wears. However, we also have to take into account the fantastic visuals both director Soavi (a protégé of Dario Argento, and it shows) and cinematographer Renato Tafuri bring to the proceedings. There's a plethora of stunningly beautiful shots, with the camera swooping across the theatre stage like the proverbial night owl. Plus, the pedigree behind the film goes even deeper. Radice (billed under his Anglo-name, John Morghen), was already famous for such horror classics as The House on the Edge of the Park, City of the Living Dead and Cannibal Ferox, and is instantly recognisable. In addition, behind the scenes, George Eastman, the foetus-eating wrong 'un from Anthropophagus: the Beast, wrote the script (although the dialogue was extensively re-done) and apparently played the killer when the owl-head is on, and it's produced by that film's director, Joe D'Amato. That it's not more well known is quite a sin.

Despite (or maybe because of) the ludicrous dubbing - Radice's camp dancer is a scream, literally - there's a lot of fun to be had, and the pomptastic '80s synth score is as rousing as any of the more famous Italian classics. The killings are perhaps not as elaborate as those committed to celluloid by Mario Bava, Argento, or Lucio Fulci, but are impressively bloody nonetheless. It's also still remarkably suspenseful, and a number of now-clichéd jump scares still actually succeed.

However, the release is an essential purchase by virtue of its array of extra features. The Blu-ray boasts almost three hours' worth of bonus goodies. Some are short but sweet, like a comparison between the uncut print presented here and the 1987 UK video release. A talking heads feature with director Soavi and actor Barbara Cupisti talking (subtitled) their way through their career highlights is very enlightening, as is an on-screen interview with Radice. UK film journalist (and head honcho behind FrightFest) Alan Jones spouts the virtues of the film and the director. The two meatiest morsels are an archival documentary about producer D'Amato, which, while low quality, is fascinating, and a newly made item, The Revenge of the Video Cassette, which is a fun homage to the old tape format. Featuring interviews with collectors and amusing asides highlighting some of the weird and wonderful things that have been inspired by the machines (a VHS recorder converted into a toaster, anyone?) it's a greatly entertaining item, only hampered by the insistence of overdoing the faux 'drop-outs' and tracking lines. It's a fantastically put together package of a good - if not great - film, and well worth having.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

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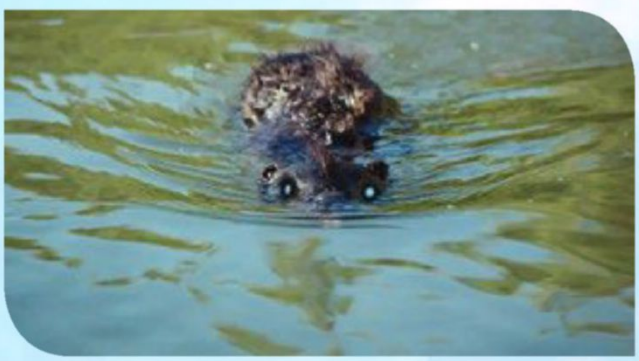


ZOMBEAVERS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JORDAN RUBIN / SCREENPLAY: JORDAN RUBIN, AL KAPLAN, JON KAPLAN / STARRING: CHAD ANDERSON, LEXI ATKINS, BRENT BRISCOE / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 20TH

Ha-ha – Zombeavers. Best. Title. Ever. Did you watch the trailer? Best. Trailer. Ever. Beavers and zombies! Can you imagine it? Zombeavers! Best. Idea. Ever.

As far back as the 1960s, writers such as Ado Kyrou noted the sublime qualities found in cinematic works deemed technically inept and unsophisticated. Today's mockbusters and other very low-budget monster movies, such as the one currently under consideration, count on a similarly charitable reception. Looking like a mass outbreak of crippling hipster irony, these goofy movies are lapped up by audiences with expectations fried by weed and/or copious brewskis. Mostly college kids, then.

Zombeavers – you'd never have guessed it – started its journey to the big screen as a title dreamed up one afternoon. A screenplay was bashed out and the production light turned green. It seems quite incredible such a flimsy idea can produce so much creative excitement and buzz. Was the title repeated over and over like a mantra, incantation or prayer?

Three gal pals head out for a weekend of chillaxing in the countryside. A road accident pollutes a local stream and beaver dam. The beloved water rodents get their living dead on and proceed to terrorise the girls and their bozo boyfriends, who turn up after dark wanting to get laid and party.

Even if Jordan Rubin's modest aim was to turn in a comedy about bad monster movies, he still ended up with a bad monster movie. The stupid characters and puerile humour further exacerbate an already paper-thin scenario. Yes, Zombeavers is rubbish from start to finish and the joke, ultimately, is on the audience. Laugh at the title all you want, there is only so much mileage to be gleaned from the concept, trailer, poster and endless jokes about beavers and a lady's holiest of holies.

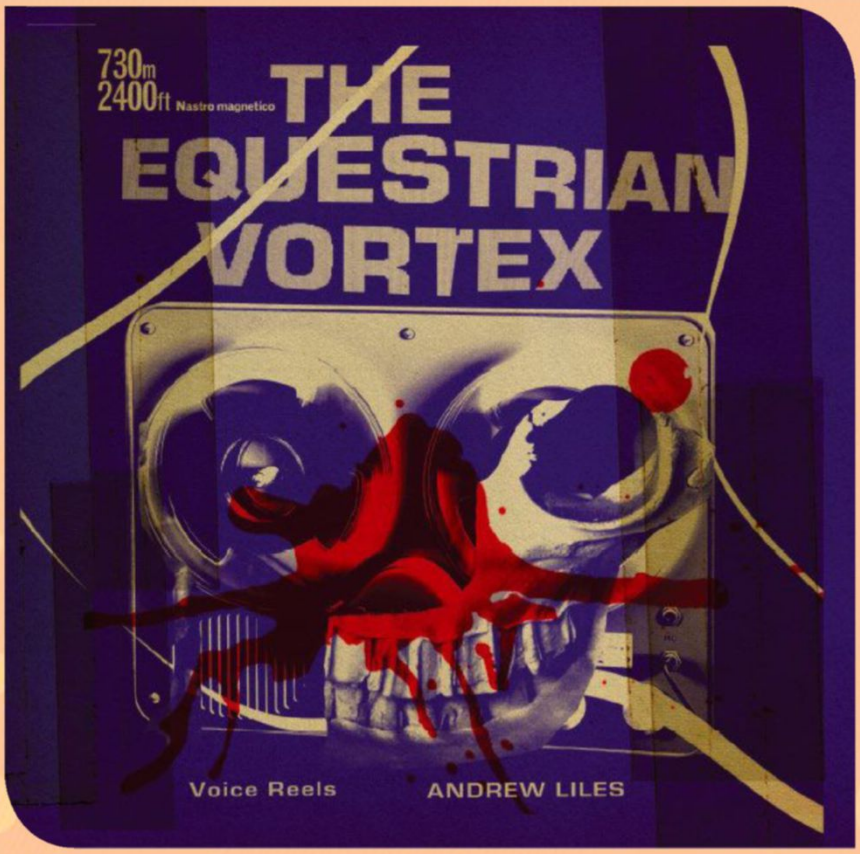
Why be so hard on a horror comedy made for stoners and the late night crowd? Because it fosters anti-creativity. Really, it does. The message is this: turn in any old crap, get a wacky title and you'll get a laugh and earn a tidy profit. These movies are not made for posterity and will be swallowed up by the abyss of time. They're total junk. If you're in the mood for a laugh, watch Joe Dante's Piranha or even Alexandre Aja's 2010 remake. Go home, Zombeavers, you're not funny.

MARTYN CONTERIO

3

OST

THE STARBURST GUIDE TO THE LATEST SOUNDTRACKS BY NICK SPACEK



The absolute biggest news of the last month came out of September's MondoCon in Austin, Texas. In addition to the slew of exclusive album releases from Mondo, they announced that Death Waltz label head Spencer Hickman will be head of operations for Mondo's vinyl division. Hickman said in a statement: "*We intend to build a full-service record label offering incredible music in all formats: vinyl, CD & digital. Our goal is to make Mondo the 'go-to' label for fans, filmmakers and composers alike.*"

Death Waltz will continue on as a separate entity, and have already released information about a forthcoming album: *The Equestrian Vortex*, which was the film-within-a-film in 2013's **Berberian Sound Studio**. Details for the release reveal it to be a 10-inch vinyl release, "*using the sound design for the critically acclaimed film **Berberian Sound Studio**,*" with one track per side. It seems as if this is a recreation of the film as an audio adventure, much like the **Star Wars** or Disney recordings of the '70s and '80s – only far more macabre.

As far as Mondo's releases go, they all debuted in limited editions at last month's convention, but have been, or will be, made available online via the Mondo website. It's a pretty amazing trio of LPs. First up is the Nathan Johnson score to **Looper**, which – in addition to a Jay Shaw-designed package that looks like a canvas bag filled with gold bars – comes with a bonus 7-inch featuring a piano version of the main theme, along with Kid Koala's *Slinky Dance*.

Daniel Mudford and Pete Woodhead's **Shaun of the Dead** score makes its debut in full. While pieces of the score were on Island's 2004 soundtrack release, this is the first time it will be available complete. The cover artwork is by Jock. If it looks familiar, it's because it's from his Mondo poster for the film, but he's also created additional, new artwork, for the interior gatefold. Much in the same way that **Shaun of the Dead** is both a parody and excellent example of a zombie movie, the score does a fantastic job of aping Goblin and other artists' scores, and this is a must-own.

Mondo's third and final new release is Alex North's original score to **2001: A Space Odyssey**. North scored the entirety of the Stanley Kubrick film, but Kubrick famously became so attached to the classical music he was using as a scratch track while editing the film, he chose not to use any of North's work. According to North, he didn't discover that Kubrick had done this until sitting through the film's premiere. The LP comes in another Jay Shaw-designed gatefold sleeve.

Being as how Halloween will soon be upon us, it seems that all of the other labels have made announcements of a decidedly spooky nature. There's not much sci-fi or other genre fare to be found lately, just a lot of horror. I'm quite fine with that, if you all are as well.

Waxwork continued their spate of teases with a photo from Clive Barker's **Nightbreed**, and the words, "details soon." One can only hope that this continues the label's spate of rather excellent '80s film score releases. While we've no idea what it will entail, one can certainly hope that Barker – who is an artist himself – will somehow be involved in the design.

They've also announced a double-LP release of the music to the criminally underrated 2007 horror anthology **Trick 'r Treat**. The film was notorious for having a trailer released, then sat on the shelf for several years, until being unceremoniously dumped onto DVD. It's a charmer, and the sort of film that makes one wonder as to why it never made it into the theatres. Douglas Pipes' score pays homage to classic horror films, working in minimalist strings and ambient sounds, and is a real linchpin for the movie. This will likely be a big seller for the label (as is everything else Waxwork does).

Speaking of Clive Barker, from last column to this, One Way Static announced and nearly sold out of their release of the score to Barker's 1992 film, **Candyman**, as composed and performed by the legendary

Philip Glass. It's a great score, and the first really modern film to be tackled by the label. As per usual, One Way Static pulls out all the stops for this release. There's a vinyl version, with black limited to 1400 copies, as well as bee-striped and silver mirror vinyl, each limited versions of 500, and a clear yellow vinyl version sold exclusively through Clive Barker's website. There's also a cassette edition, limited to 100 copies, which has exclusive content, "like foreign trailer audio," according the label.

One Way Static also had a MondoCon and Beyond Fest exclusive, with Shooting Guns' music for this year's breakout film festival favorite, **Wolfcop**. The film's gotten rabid acclaim from everyone who's thus far seen it and a big part of the appeal seems to be Shooting Guns' score, which combines Carpenter-style synth with huge Black Sabbath riffs. It's a style ably suited for a film that mixes action and horror, creating an atmosphere of pumped-up energy and uneasy tension. The LP's exclusive to MondoCon and Beyond Fest, but any of the 1000 red and blue marbled vinyl copies leftover will be sold through One Way Static around the time this issue comes out.

While not horror per se, NBC's **Hannibal** television series has consistently pushed the limits of shocking network television. Outside of FX's **American Horror Story**, I can't think of a program with commercial interruptions that regularly ups the gore quotient so highly. The atmospheric creepiness of the program is due in no small part to composer Brian Reitzell's score. Invada Records will be giving the music the devoted attention it deserves, by releasing all of Reitzell's work as four double LP sets. That's an astonishing eight LPs' worth of music. The double LPs will be available on coloured and black vinyl, either singly or as a massive box set in December. The music has already been released digitally and on compact disc by Lakeshore Records, with Season Two's music out just last month.

Invada's also releasing Craig Safan's score to the 1985 sci-fi film, **Warning Signs**. Along with the inclusion of 15 unreleased cues, the score's been completely remastered, and will be available on double vinyl LP, as well as compact disc and digital. It's gloriously Vangelis-like with its arpeggiated synths.

La La Land Records released a double-CD set of Mark Mothersbaugh's score to

both **21 Jump Street** and its sequel, **22 Jump Street**. Mothersbaugh, best known for his work with seminal new wave group Devo, has also composed iconic themes for the likes of **Pee-Wee's Playhouse** and **Rugrats**. His work for these Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum buddy-cop movies isn't as quirky or interesting as his prior compositions, but it's a nice take on action-adventure clichés, much like the film itself.

We announced last month that Ramin Djawadi's score for **Game of Thrones: Season 4** would be released by Music On Vinyl. It appears we're going to get more of Djawadi's music on wax, courtesy of the venerable Varèse Sarabande. It's a limited-edition, double 180-gram vinyl version of the music for the show's first season, and will be a Black Friday special – Black Friday being the day after Thanksgiving in the United States, and traditionally the start of the last big push toward the holiday shopping season.

Silva Screen continues their seemingly inexhaustible supply of **Doctor Who** soundtracks, releasing another full episode score, this time for *Ghost Light*, a three-part series starring Sylvester McCoy as the Seventh Doctor and featuring the music of Mark Ayres. It's a double LP on 180-gram vinyl, and is limited to 1000 copies. Silva Screen previously released this on CD in 1993 and 2013.

Dual Planet's upcoming releases include the first volume of library music from Eric Siday, **Sounds of Now**. The label's previously released music from Siday. A compilation entitled **Ultra Sonic Perception** was released last year, and featured a collection of music culled from library 78-rpm records as used in **Doctor Who** episodes of the '60s and '70s. **Sounds of Now** features "electronic 'sound logos' and switched-on library cues" from the same era, including variations on the Screen Gems logo – a piece so infamous, it had a 2010 documentary, **The S From Hell**, devoted to it. We spoke with the label's James Pianta, from Dual Planet's Australian base. When asked about Dual Planet's focus on library music, and what the appeal is, Pianta said, "*Personally speaking, although I imagine it is a common experience, interest in Library music is an extension of being a record collector seeking out obscure film music. When exploring the genre, sooner or later the concept of 'library music' will become apparent. A love of electronic music, jazz and avant-garde music also makes library music very appealing.*"

Dual Planet's focus is strictly electronic music, so that's what you're going to hear when you pick up one of their releases, but Pianta admits that beyond that, "*I guess it comes down to personal taste with a focus on obscure and rare recordings,*" with a similar approach behind Dual Planet's focus on Australian musicians. While the focus wasn't intentional from the start, the label being ran by Australians allowed easier access and information to Australian content.

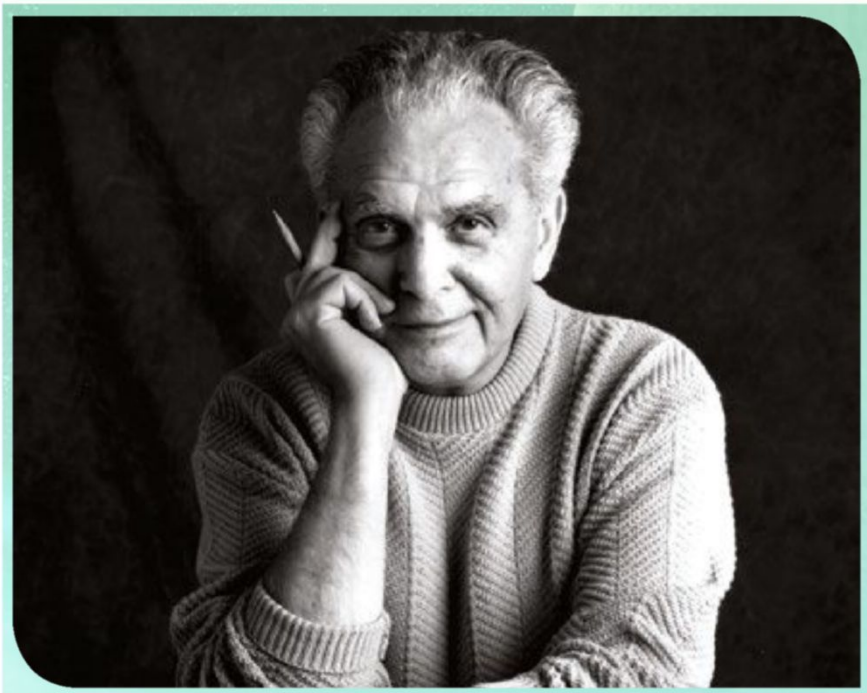
Part of what makes Dual Planet's releases so appealing is their design approach and liner notes which read like well-researched magazine articles. The liner notes are all by Jon Dale, a freelance writer friend of Pianta's who also does pieces across the other labels associated with Dual Planet. The artwork, which has a '70s-by-way-of-the-modern-age vibe, is designed as such because, according to Pianta, "*As our releases are reissues or archival projects mainly from the 1960s/70s I think it's important to capture the aesthetic of the period but also the design needs to have a strong contemporary identity.*"

Pianta promises a lot more interesting things on the way after their upcoming **Turkey Shoot** release:

"*Loads of exciting releases on the horizon – more cult electronic soundtracks, cosmic music and outsider electronics. Plus, we are developing our new sub-imprints, two joint labels with Finders Keepers Records in the UK – Monster Skies, an esoteric psychedelic label and Twisted Nerve Australia, a space for contemporary recordings.*"

BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS YOU THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GENRE LITERATURE



Jack Kirby Estate and Marvel Settle

A joint statement was recently released by the Kirby Estate and Marvel comics, "*Marvel and the family of Jack Kirby have amicably resolved their legal disputes, and are looking forward to advancing their shared goal of honouring Mr Kirby's significant role in Marvel's history.*"

This ends the long-running legal dispute between Kirby's family and Marvel. Jack Kirby designed the distinctive Marvel look and was responsible for creating many of the iconic characters Marvel is famous for. The legal action not only involved Marvel but also Sony, Fox and Universal, as those studios currently have limited rights on certain Marvel characters. Kirby's input had previously between declared 'work for hire' by the Appeals Court, which prompted a series of long and drawn out legal proceedings. At the time of going to print, the nature of the settlement was undisclosed, but we understand that all involved are satisfied with the results.

Angry Robot Saved by Die-Hard Sci-fi Fan

Entrepreneur and Digital Artist Etan Ilfeld has purchased sci-fi and fantasy book publisher Angry Robot Books from publishing house Osprey. The deal also included Watkins Publishing who make mind, body, and spirit books and Nourish, who produce cook books. Ilfeld already owns the Watkins bookshop in London, and this deal has reunited the publishing imprint with its original home. The entrepreneur is a huge fan of all things science fiction, and it seems likely the Angry Robot will continue to publish the same sort of award winning fiction that it always has.

Bradbury Estate Auction

The estate of iconic sci-fi author Ray Bradbury went under the hammer recently. Items of interest included his retro Hugo award, which went for $28,734, whilst his Saturn award only went for $2,625. A spade, which was once owned by George Bernard Shaw and inspired Bradbury to write a poem about it, went for $6,250; hopefully to another world class author.

Eugie Foster Dies

Hugo nominee and Nebula award winning author Eugie Foster recently passed away due to complications with Large B-Cell Lymphoma. She was 42. Best known as the driving force behind American convention Dragon Con and a powerful figure in the young adult literature community, she will be sorely missed by us all.

THE SCARLET GOSPELS is on its Way

It's taken ten years, but horror writer Clive Barker has finally announced that his magnum opus, **The Scarlet Gospels** will be available in Spring 2015. The book will see hardboiled paranormal detective Harry D'Amour take on Pinhead and his squad of cenobites. Pinhead is best known to the public via the **Hellraiser** movies, though readers will know that the monster first appeared in the novella **The Hellbound Heart**. D'Amour first appeared in Barker's **Books of Blood Volume 6** and was a character in the movie **Lord of Illusion**. We're told that the **The Scarlet Gospels** will give us the full secrets behind Pinhead and chums; fingers crossed that Barker will still have such sights to show us.

Amazon and Disney Settle

It's been a month of reconciliation for the House of Mouse; not only have they come to an arrangement with the Kirby Estate, they have also buried the hatchet with Amazon. The online retailer has been scrapping over pricing, promotion and placement with Disney, and this has included all Marvel products, as Disney owns Marvel. The dispute has now been resolved and you can yet again pre-order Marvel and Disney graphic novels on Amazon.

Mike Carey's LUCIFER to Hit TV Screens

The Fox Network has commissioned a pilot of Mike Carey's graphic novel, **Lucifer**. The comic book details what the devil got up to once he quit his job as ruler of hell, and contains multiple plots normally avoided by mainstream TV. Lucifer is an interesting choice for a TV show and is possibly trying to steal the crown from the ailing (but still popular) show **Supernatural**. We wish it the best of luck and hope that Fox doesn't do another **Firefly**.

ED FORTUNE HIGHLIGHTS NOTEWORTHY NEW TITLES

COMING SOON

THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES - VISUAL COMPANION

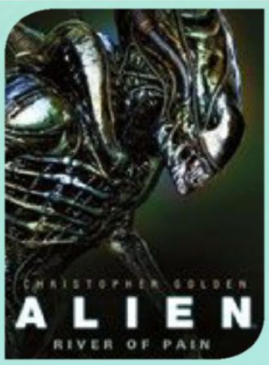
AUTHOR: JUDE FISHER
PUBLISHER: HARPER COLLINS
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 20TH

With a movie as lush and as deep as **The Hobbit** series, a good set of well chosen stills with some accompanying insights into how the movie was made makes for a nice addition to anyone addicted to all things Bilbo related. **The Battle of the Five Armies** is the final movie in the series and anyone looking for an appropriate stocking filler or some nice pictures of Bilbo, Smaug and the Dwarves will probably already have this pre-ordered.

THE DARK DEFILES

AUTHOR: RICHARD MORGAN
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 20TH

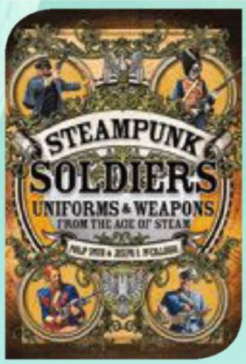
The epic fantasy tale that began in **The Steel Remains** and was continued in **The Cold Commands** finally ends with **The Dark Defiles**. Coming in at a whopping 240,000 words, this winter page-turner promises to reveal the final fate of the three heroes and the dark secrets of the series. Praised as a grim-dark Michael Moorcock, this eagerly-awaited finale looks to be perfect winter reading.



ALIEN: RIVER OF PAIN

AUTHOR: CHRISTOPHER GOLDEN
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 25TH

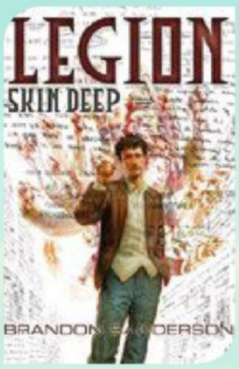
Fans of the **Alien** series will know that there is a large gap in time between the events of **Alien** and what happens in **Aliens**. This novel reveals how the colonists came to LV-426, what happened to the marines and colonists stationed there, and how there came to be only one survivor... a young girl called Newt.



STEAMPUNK SOLDIERS

AUTHORS: PHILIP SMITH AND JOSEPH MCCULLOUGH
PUBLISHER: OSPREY PUBLISHING
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 20TH

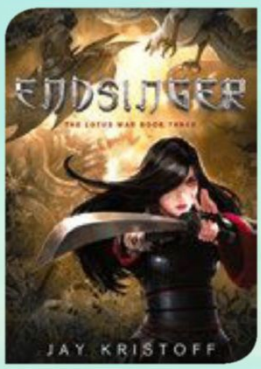
Less about the phenomena of gluing cogs to things and painting them copper and more about the sort of uniforms soldiers wore around the world during the age of steam, this book nonetheless will prove an invaluable resource for the cog-foppery crowd, collecting the artwork of uniform obsessed Victorian artist Miles Vandercroft into one volume.



LEGION: SKIN DEEP

AUTHOR: BRANDON SANDERSON
PUBLISHER: SUBTERRANEAN PRESS
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 30TH

Critically acclaimed and extremely popular fantasy novelist Brandon Sanderson has finally produced a follow up to his cult novella **Legion**. This latest story, **Skin Deep**, follows the continuing adventures of Stephen Leeds, a remarkable man who can hallucinate mulitiple personas, the twist being is that each persona has their own set of extremely useful and specialised skills.



ENDSINGER

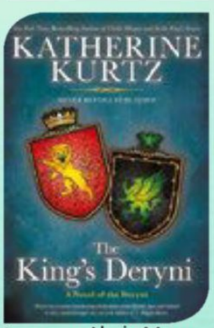
AUTHOR: JAY KRISTOFF
PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 25TH

This one is going to be a weepy. Jay Kristoff's critically acclaimed series, The Lotus War, ends with this final volume. With civil war sweeping across the Shima Imperium, it's up to heroes Yukiko and Buruu to patch together the fragments of the rebellion and save what they can, as conspiracy and in-fighting tears the world apart.

DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE

AUTHOR: WIZARDS OF THE COAST
PUBLISHER: HASBRO
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 18TH

The Fifth Edition of **Dungeons and Dragons** has been a hit so far, and it looks likely that the world's most well-known roleplaying game may well make a comeback and win back its title as best-selling RPG (a title currently held by Pathfinder). With both the **Monster Manual** and **Player's Handbook** being critically acclaimed, all eyes are on the **Dungeon Masters Guide** to seal the deal and complete the three-book series. If this is as good as the previous two Fifth Edition core books, then success is almost certainly guaranteed.



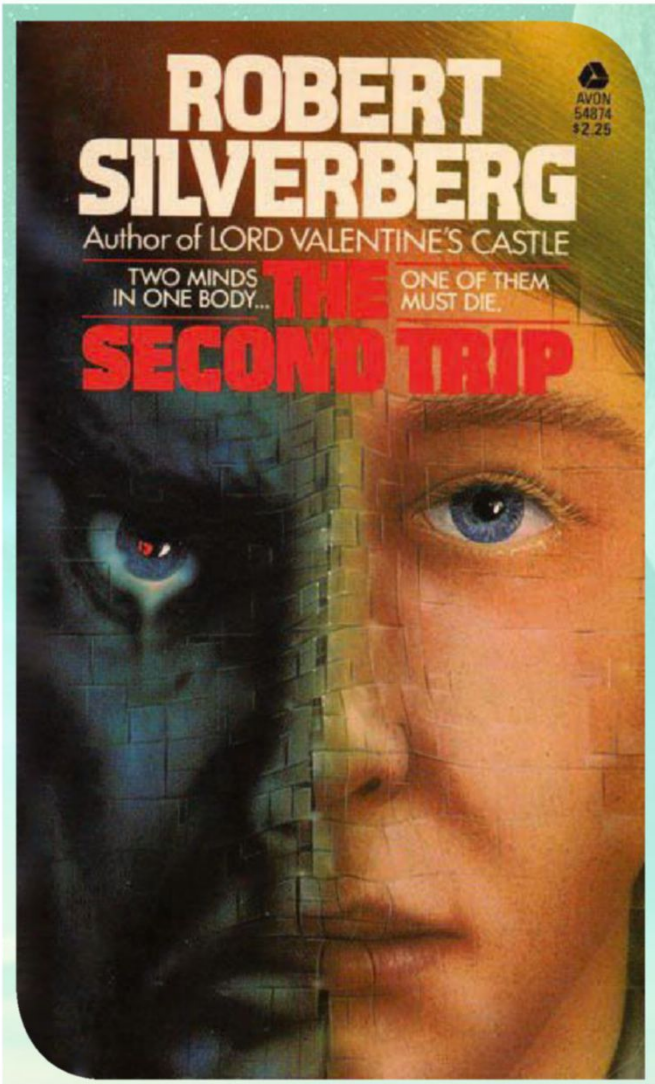
THE KING'S DERYNI

AUTHOR: KATHERINE KURTZ
PUBLISHER: ACE BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2ND

New York Times bestselling author Katherine Kurtz's novels of the Deryni is a stunning example of the author's incredible powers of world-building and storytelling. Kurtz has finally ended her thrilling epic Childe Morgan trilogy, in which bonds of both magic and loyalty will be put to the ultimate test. Fans of Kurtz's historical fantasy will finally discover what happens to young Alaric Morgan as he grows up under the protection of the newly crowned King Brion Haldane.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK OF GENRE FICTION BY KATE FATHERS



The great thing about sci-fi set in the near future is reading it in said future. Sometimes it's scarily accurate, other times it's hilariously off-base, but each offer us a look in to humanity's progress - how far we've come and where we have yet to go.

The Second Trip is set in 2011, in New York City where Paul Macy has just been released from a Rehab centre. He's completely new - a new man in an old body; the previous personality destroyed on a court order - and he's ready to begin his new life in law-abiding peace. But when he bumps in to someone from his long-gone past, he discovers that the desire to live is stronger than any drug or machine.

Published in 1972, this is neither Robert Silverberg's first book nor his most distinguished, but it is one that definitely deserves some attention by sci-fi and psychological thriller fans alike. The novel's primary focus is on the relationship between the born personality of Nat Hamlin and the created personality of Paul Macy, chiefly their struggle for control over their shared body. Through them Silverberg is able to discuss the theme of identity, particularly how tied our identities are to our bodies. In fact, Silverberg does a really remarkable thing in this book: addressing artificial life when the life in question is not artificial at all. Paul Macy's body is flesh, not a cybernetic creation like so many AI stories, which adds a fascinating layer to that kind of narrative. Because if the body was human-born, but the personality was not, how real is that personality? How valid is Macy's experience, when his past is a fiction and his body has lived thirty-five years without him? How true are his thoughts and beliefs when they were all informed by doctors in a lab? And do those things matter, when Macy can think and feel and act on his own; can love and learn and change like anyone? It's a beautiful debate and the conclusion, I think, is a wonderfully human one.

As I intimated earlier, one of the best things about this book is reading it in 2014. Silverberg's vision of a technologically advanced twenty-first century is not a new one (hello, *2001: A Space Odyssey*!), but it offers us an opportunity to see some of the hopes and fears the not-too-distant past had for us. In some areas we've disappointed (we're still in the Roomba stage of personal robotics), but in others we've exceeded expectations; even those Silverberg might not even have known he set. The white rhino is barely threatened and so is the red kangaroo; we still have great green spaces, women are more than secretaries and cassettes have gone the way of the Dodo. In some ways, reading this book is an excellent exercise for us; for all that its inaccuracies are hilarious, it reminds us how much worse our present could have been, and how fortunate we are that most of the time, fiction gets it wrong.

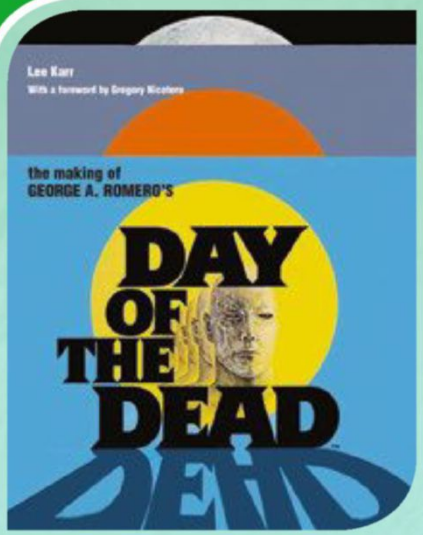
As for the prose, it's excellent. Silverberg's style is straightforward and easy to read, yet his command of language can be beautiful, poetic, and heartbreaking in its simplicity. He superbly handles the changes in narrative mode, and the characters themselves are distinct and real, and begging for your sympathy. Hamlin and Macy are the most fleshed out, with Lissa Moore (Hamlin's mistress and the reluctant Macy's friend) coming in a close third, and if I had one complaint it's that I think Lissa could have been given more depth. Her story revolves around Hamlin and Macy, and even seems purposefully crafted to make it so, such as a family she has lost contact with and no mention of what she's done while Macy has been in Rehab. On the one hand, this makes sense given that the novel is firmly set in Macy's perspective. On the other, it does keep Lissa from feeling like a completely independent, fully realised character. She had four years without Hamlin in body or mind, why was that not worthy of mentioning?

One thing I don't have a problem with, though, is the occasional bit of '70s slang. I am so glad that in the real 2011 no one was hip to anyone's jive.

All in all, *The Second Trip* is an excellent novel, and one everyone should read. Some might be put off by some of its more '70s flaws (such as moments of non-PC language and the heavily sexualised descriptions of women), but the story and the psychology more than make up for them. And if you don't like this book, Silverberg has over fifty years of work to choose from.

THE LATEST RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



THE MAKING OF GEORGE A. ROMERO'S DAY OF THE DEAD

AUTHOR: LEE KARR / PUBLISHER: PLEXUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

While the original Night of the Living Dead has been eulogised in print numerous times, and the follow up Dawn of the Dead likewise has had plenty of column inches devoted to it, the third film, Day of the Dead seems to be the forgotten son. Until now, that is. Karr's lavishly (and gorily) illustrated and meticulously researched tome takes the reader through the full development of the story, from the initial script drafts to its lukewarm reception and eventual acceptance as a classic example of intelligent horror cinema.

Covering the entire history of the production in detail in a diary format, the main bulk of the book (Chapter 3) is a fascinating read, brilliantly informative without being too technical or dry. Recounting the 56-day shoot retrospectively, Karr instils the process with comments and recollections from many of the cast and crew involved. One date in particular - December 6th, 1984 - stands out, as it was actor Joe Pilato's final scene; the famous moment in which hordes of the ravenous dead tear him apart. Rare photographs of the various stages of Tom Savini and Greg Nicotero's stunning special effect make-up naturally accompany this, some of which are so graphic that one can almost smell the infamous putrefied pig entrails used to pack out the fake part of Captain Rhodes. As brilliantly detailed as the text is, the photos make the book even more compelling. Many are, as one would expect, gloriously gory, which allows the reader to really inspect the remarkable work the effects team did, although there are also some that are rather amusing, showing that all the crew had a blast while making the film.

Like the film itself, the book is such a remarkable read that one can imagine coming back to it many times in the future. Nicotero provides the foreword to this opus, revealing he had hoped to publish a similar account himself not long after the film's release, and as such provided a wealth of notes and material from his archive. We can only be thankful that he documented the shoot as thoroughly as it's superb and an essential addition to any fan's bookshelf.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

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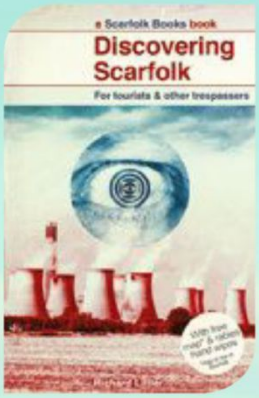


DISCOVERING SCARFOLK

AUTHOR: RICHARD LITTLER
PUBLISHER: EBURY
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There was a time in British history in which the outside world seemed terribly sinister, everything was falling apart and people were frequently cold and hungry. Worse still, if you believe the photos of the time, everything had a washed out, sepia-like tinge to it that made it all the more depressing. This time was the 1970s, and it provides a backdrop to the creepy yet hilarious world of Scarfolk, an English town that has been forsaken by all things, including reality itself.

The 192-page hardback novel Discovering Scarfolk started out as a satirical blog created by graphic designer Richard Littler. Cleverly twisted info-graphics evoked a forgotten little English town called Scarfolk, a sort of hideous cross between The Wicker Man's Summerisle and The League of Gentleman's Royston Vasey. Filled to the brim with old-fashioned style graphics, the website pokes fun at the creepy and hyperbolic public information posters from the '70s and '80s, adding a monstrous twist to the entire affair. Often what seems funny on the internet doesn't quite work when it's transferred into a paper and ink format, but Littler's approach has been to wrap all of these splendidly produced pictures into a decidedly odd narrative, peppering the text with strange graphic, after even stranger graphic.

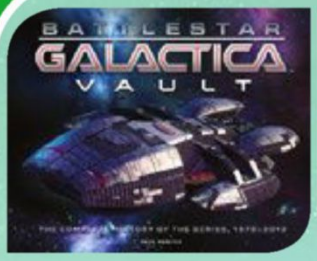
The result is a multi-layered narrative. On the face of it, Discovering Scarfolk is a hilarious novel filled with so-creepy-it's funny illustrations and a relentlessly silly back story. The puns are thick and fast throughout and it's also filled with pretty puerile humour. Scratch the surface a bit more and we get a much sharper parody of life in a British town. Satirical digs at local councils, media and religious groups form an essential part of the story. Dig even further, and you realise that the entire thing is a well-deserved and cunningly observed parody of modern Britain, reminiscent of Jonathan Swift at times. Those who are easily offended are firmly warned to stay away; the humour is quite dark and is not for the easily disturbed or for self-appointed moral guardians.

The text itself is a conspiracy story detailing the tale of missing children and the growing insanity of the book's protagonist. Littler takes the time to put the boot into various conspiracy theories as well and the text itself becomes increasingly strange and paranoid. The images increase in their oddness and the result is a relentlessly funny yet rather disturbing experience. The discomfort simply makes the gags funnier and the result is a book that is genuinely laugh out loud funny but also makes you wonder what is wrong with you. The laughter will stay with you for some time, as will the commentary.

If you have a taste for the macabre and strange, or simply wish that there was a thoroughly English version of Welcome to Night Vale, then you should check out Discovering Scarfolk. Be warned however; you can check out Scarfolk any time you like, but you can never leave.

ED FORTUNE

9



BATTLESTAR GALACTICA VAULT: THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE SERIES, 1978-2012

AUTHOR: PAUL RUDITIS
PUBLISHER: AURUM PRESS
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

In this age of websites and e-books, it's sometimes easy to forget that books themselves can be beautiful objects in their own right. Sometimes, you want a thing that is not only worth reading, but will also look very pretty on the shelf afterwards. Battlestar Galactica Vault: The Complete History of The Series, 1978-2012 is a fine example of a work that is not only designed to delight a certain sort of fan, but also meant to look lovely on a shelf filled with all things Battlestar Galactica.

The book is a dense hardback with a magnetic flap cover; pull back the cover and you get treated to two envelopes filled with goodies and 170-odd-pages of glossy images and easy flowing text. The author has done his best to be comprehensive here and the book does go into a lot of detail on the subject of both shows. Ruditis has tracked down interviews with people from across the history of the series, and it's interesting to compare the radically different approaches between the old series and the reboot. The insights into the ending of each series are particularly interesting and useful, especially to those who may have been disappointed by the end of the rebooted series.

There is some nice commentary on the various spin-off shows, though not that much on the notorious Galactica 1980, which many fans may be thankful for. This is very much a friendly book written by fans for fans; don't expect any down-and-dirty gossip, and certainly don't expect any particular revelations. Instead, what we have is the sort of window into the series that most fans have not gotten before and a clearer understanding as to how much sci-fi TV shows have changed over the years. It's a solid read, written in an easy-going and friendly style, and is effortless to dip into and out of.

Production wise, it's well presented, though those with clumsy fingers should be warned: this is a pretty coffee table book designed to be enjoyed at home and won't stand up to unusual abuse. The envelopes in the front and back that contain the various memorabilia can be easily torn by the careless, and the glossy pages will bend if you're too rough with them. Handsome this book may be, but it isn't a field manual and shouldn't be treated like one.

The memorabilia that comes with the book is a lot of fun. In addition to a vintage style poster, we get print outs from the Galactica and a copy of one of Starbuck's maps, we also get film stills and scripts. These little details are a real treat and even though they're all replicas, you really feel a connection to both versions of the show. Those still addicted to Battlestar Galactica will be delighted by this addition to their horde of Galactica-related loot.

ED FORTUNE

7

SCI-FI CHRONICLES: A VISUAL HISTORY OF THE GALAXY'S GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION

AUTHOR: GUY HALEY
PUBLISHER: AURUM PRESS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The sci-fi genre has always fascinated, and for well over a hundred years has provided an artistic outlet for many, utilising almost every available medium. This weighty tome attempts to give an overview of the progression of the various different properties that have emerged over that time.

Laid out in chronological order, what we have is a potted - but incredibly detailed - history of science fiction, from the publication of Frankenstein in 1818 right up to Avatar (2009). Nothing particularly ground-breaking, then? Well, actually, yes. Rather than follow the standard for a chronology - which would involve a lot of too-and-froing should one wish to look up, say, Doctor Who. Instead, each entry follows the timeline of a particular story, film, writer, etc. So, for example, H.G. Wells' section contains an overview of his work, then various adaptations, in the various mediums. Entries that have a rich legacy of reinterpretation and adaptation also have a timeline graphic at the bottom of the page, which is great for at-a-glance reference. There's also pages dedicated to specific 'universe' items. For instance, there's a Dune entry that attempts to summarise the epic saga within a few hundred words, but this, along with a timeline of important events in the story may well be enough for someone to bluff their way through a conversation on Frank Herbert's work.

There's so much crammed into this book, it becomes a joy to just flick to a random page and learn something new. It's not going to go in-depth on the intricacies of plots, or provide everything you always wanted to know about Seaquest DSV, but there's more than enough here to keep one entertained, fascinated and educated for hours.

It's something one can keep coming back to, just like any good reference book should be. Beautifully illustrated and written in a comfortable style that is neither condescending nor dumbed-down, it's an impressive read.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

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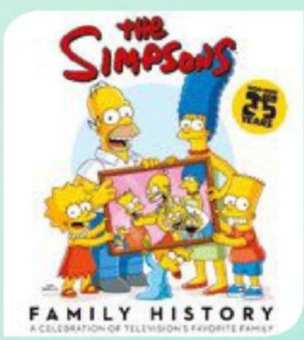

THE SIMPSONS FAMILY HISTORY

AUTHOR: MATT GROENING
PUBLISHER: HARRY N ABRAMS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Matt Groening has produced a hefty tome with The Simpsons Family History; a book destined to grace the coffee tables of many a fan of the show come Christmas morning. It's a 300-page epic keen to tell you that the show is now 25 years old and that this is a celebration of television's favourite family.

This book takes material from numerous episodes and re-orders them into a chronology; this of course does rather highlight the 'Simpsons Dating Conundrum' in that the show is always set in the present, yet has run for more than two decades. As the characters (poor Maggie included) don't age beyond the odd birthday / Christmas (and rather a lot of Halloweens) the exact period in history of any event becomes rather haphazard.

The Simpsons Family History ignores all this and, instead, shows us the birth of Homer, his mother, meeting Marge (several times) and their courtship. The book then races through past Homer's jobs, the births of Bart, Lisa and Maggie, and not a lot else. This is the weakness; there is no actual substance to this book, nothing added to your appreciation of the show.

Ultimately, any Simpsons fan will get some entertainment by dipping into this book and being reminded of many of the shows stories, but that will quickly wear thin. Given the level of re-runs available on the small screen it is not likely that many will read it cover to cover or return to it once the first wave of interest has washed over them.

This is destined to be opened on Christmas Day, browsed on Boxing Day, but by Twelfth Night put away on a shelf and forgotten until the space is needed for something else. This is really only for serious fans of the show with space on their shelves.

TONY JONES

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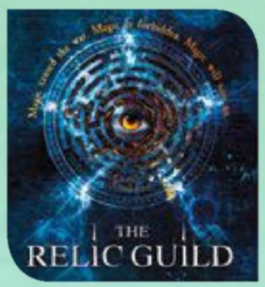

THE RELIC GUILD

AUTHOR: EDWARD COX
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Once, the Labyrinth was a great meeting place, when humans traded with the Houses of god-like beings known as the Aelfir. Forty years ago, there was a terrible war; one fought with magic that ruined everything. The Labyrinth became more a prison than city, trapping its human denizens behind hundred-feet-high walls, and it was deemed that all magic was forbidden. Now, forty years later, the battle commences anew as an evil Thaumaturgist is returned to life. Only a legendary band of heroes, the Relic Guild, has the power to stand in this man's way.

Debut author Edward Cox takes this central concept and places it in a world that is almost Victorian in nature, creating an exciting blend of steampunk, fantasy, horror, and pulp adventure. His world is incredibly detailed, but it never threatens to take over the narrative; in fact, what happened decades ago has a bearing on the present, so much so that Cox takes both timelines and weaves them together to form the plot of his first novel. He does it well, but there are times when it's hard to tell them apart – put the book down mid-chapter, for instance, and it may be difficult to immediately recall which era you're in when you next pick it up.

The book starts with a prologue that initially feels like the author is shouting "look, here's my bad guy, isn't he powerful and nasty" but as the pages turn, that introduction becomes more relevant. After that, we're straight into the action, where a shapeshifter known as Clara is being pursued by two rival bounty hunters. Clara is described as the book's protagonist, but she spends much of it as an observer, our eyes and ears in the strange new world she has discovered, and other characters often come across as far more interesting, which is testament to Cox's writing talent.

Cox avoids the fantasy cliché of characters being little more than their occupations or particular field of expertise, and the format of past and present allows the reader to see how much some of them have changed and developed, and why. Even the Relic Guild themselves are prepared to commit heinous acts in the name of good and, while this doesn't put them on a par with the book's Big Bad, it will have the reader wondering just how far some of them are prepared to go to achieve victory.

Sometimes, the author's inexperience shows – pacing can be haphazard, and dialogue can occasionally turn into exposition – but The Relic Guild is an intriguing, original and enjoyable book, a daring mix of genres that initially feels like it shouldn't work, but is ultimately greater than the sum of its parts.

ALISTER DAVISON

8

THE CURE FOR DREAMING

AUTHOR: CAT WINTERS
PUBLISHER: AMULET BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following the critical acclaim of her debut novel (In the Shadow of Blackbirds), Cat Winter's second effort blends fiction and myth with historical fact. A complex and satirical novel that is as much in the gothic tradition as it is young adult fiction. It begins with a quote from Dracula, which drapes the story within the Count's blackened cape.

Set in Winter's native Portland, Oregon in 1900, the plot follows 17-year-old Olivia Mead, pro-suffrage, and striving for a career in journalism. Her father, as much a personification of male ignorance and entitlement, has other plans. After attending a hypnosis show on her Halloween birthday, Olivia is put under hypnotist Henri Reverie's spell on stage. Her father decides to pay Henri to quell Olivia's rebellious suffragist ideals, to see the world for what it truly is and be unable to vocalise her anger. Olivia soon begins to see a vampire in the place of her father and cages that swallow ghosts of women.

The hypnotism, which progresses to vomiting upon hearing phrases alluding to women's lib, is not unlike the Ludovico Technique in A Clockwork Orange. The two stories curiously share a key theme, taking away choice (read: humanity). It's a concept brilliantly suited in the written word, as it deals with women denied their right to language.

The prose is efficient and doesn't compromise on bite, effortlessly evoking the period setting. That's not to say it isn't without flaws, it does suffer from repetition and some clunky metaphor, but consistently imbues the text at every turn with the plight of the suffragists, capturing the sea change at the turn of the century. It's not a pious novel, by any means, though sometimes it does wallop you upside the head.

Olivia is a fully realised character who loves to cycle (the bike being a powerful symbol of women's liberation) and reading novels, specifically horror. Typical of her age, she's shy, awkward, and full of yearning. Perhaps Winter's greatest feat is making Olivia so easily relatable to modern audiences of either gender.

Appendices are included with a recommended reading list as well as the sequential dates of when and where US women gained full suffrage. The Cure for Dreaming proves the potential, relevance, and importance of YA fiction. It's entertaining, educational and mystical. YA naysayers may have just met their match.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

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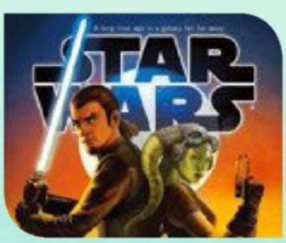

STAR WARS: A NEW DAWN

AUTHOR: JOHN JACKSON MILLER
PUBLISHER: LUCAS BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Star Wars was never very good as an example of subtle political commentary. It never felt like the right place for it. That's why we sort of tuned out during the New Republic power squabbles, the New Jedi Order series and the various 'of the Force' series. After a while, the novel line just stopped feeling like a sprawling space saga of rebellion and romance and turned into Heroes in space, full of on-going plotlines it was very hard to give a shit about.

This brings us to A New Dawn. The prequel book to the new TV series Star Wars Rebels, it introduces us to Kanan Jarrus, a likeable and funny Jedi-in-training who managed to survive Order 66 (sometimes it feels like every bloody Star Wars book features one of those). Kanan is drifting from job to job without giving away his secret until he rolls up to Gorse, the setting of this book's political intrigue. This is the main issue with the book. It's the victim of a plot that requires following supporting characters who are just discovering that the Empire - gasp! - might be doing bad things. Then it turns out that the main problem is caused by evil businessmen, like, taking our natural resources and hurting the environment, you guys. Don't get us wrong, the actual storytelling was effective. Information is masterfully held back until the right moment and there were twists we didn't see coming.

Miller is clearly a very skilled writer who makes use of clear and efficient prose to conjure up a vivid mental image. (We do feel a bit like we're writing a report card here). But, all the same, a plot it's hard to be interested in means that we'll probably not be coming back to it in the same way we will the X-Wing novels.

SCOTT VARNHAM

6

BÊTE

AUTHOR: ADAM ROBERTS
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In a world where animals have been implanted with Artificial Intelligence chips, Graham Penhaligon is preparing to kill a talking cow. So begins Bête, the latest book from Adam Roberts. Graham's dilemma – if the speech and self-awareness given by the AI means the animal should be treated more like a human being – forms the core of the novel, but this is much more than a discourse on man's treatment of animals or a promotion for vegetarianism. From the very first page, it's clear that Bête is something special. Despite the serious concept, there's an opportunity for a laugh after only a few lines; that this humour comes from the cow only serves to deepen Graham's predicament.

Graham, as narrator, is a character we can all identify with, a man who knows his flaws and accepts them as part of who he is. It's a pleasure to read about him and, thanks to the skills of the author, we're immersed in his journey rather than simply being told about it. There are moments of laugh-out-loud hilarity, yet when Graham feels pain, we feel it too; when he hurts, we hurt along with him, to the point of sharing his sadness. Be warned – there may be tears.

As the novel progresses, society inevitably alters and adapts to the new animal intelligences and, while it's all very believable, it's not necessarily in the way the reader would expect. Ultimately, because Bête is about this one man, it's all seen through his eyes; it feels post-apocalyptic at times until being reminded that society, however different, still exists.

The greatest science fiction novels take into account the changes on the people affected by the advances in technology, and Bête ranks with the best of them. What could have been just quirky and satirical – it is both – becomes so much more through intelligent writing that takes the reader through a whole range of emotions. Bête is a wonderful book that, once begun, insists on being read in one sitting; darkly comic, it's a deeply thoughtful, moving and uplifting story from a master of the genre.

ALISTER DAVISON

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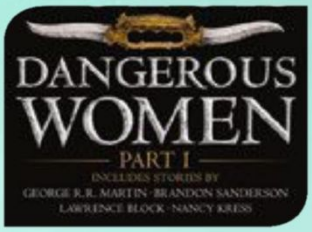

DANGEROUS WOMEN: PART ONE

EDITORS: GEORGE R.R. MARTIN, GARDNER DOZOIS
PUBLISHED: TOR BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The main attraction here is the George R.R. Martin novella 'The Princess and the Queen'. Set in the world of A Song of Ice and Fire, (the same place as A Game of Thrones), this is a lengthy account of war between warring Targaryen families. In short, this means solid dragon-on-dragon action. Set in the setting's distant past, Martin's narrative style is different to the mosaic format most of his fans are used to; it's meant to be a historical account presented in a way that is entertaining. It moves along at a reasonably entertaining pace and you can almost imagine an excited academic expounding on all the gory details of the war.

The pace continues with Carrie Vaughn's short tale, Raisa Stepanova. Set in Russia during World War II, it's the tale of a young woman who has worked hard to become a fighter pilot. Tightly written and exciting, its tone fits the dragon-fire-led excitement of the previous story perfectly well. Next up is Nancy Kress' Second Arabesque, Very Slowly. This post-apocalyptic drama is slow and, though extremely earnest, feels mechanical and soulless. Kress reduces her supporting cast to rabid and idiotic drones in order to make us care about the main characters, and it simply makes for a depressing tale that goes nowhere. Lawrence Block's crime drama, I Know How to Pick 'Em is similarly lacklustre, feeling uneven and plodding in places. However, Megan Abbot's crime drama, My Heart Is Either Broken, makes up for this disappointment by being both dark and engaging. Joe R. Lansdale is up next with a tale of two wrestlers which is, alas, instantly forgettable. The collection is finished off with a Brandon Sanderson tale of murder in the dark, Shadows for Silence in the Forests of Hell. It's a fine story of motherhood, lost innocence, deceit, and hideous spectres that can wither you into dust.

Over all, Dangerous Women Part One is worth it for both Martin and Sanderson's contributions. About half of the other stories stand their ground quite well, and it does feel like they've shuffled some of the less interesting stories into this collection, knowing that Martin's name will sell the book regardless. If you're a Song of Ice and Fire fan and you don't already have this story, then now's your chance.

ED FORTUNE

7

YOU ARE THE HERO

AUTHOR: JONATHAN GREEN
PUBLISHER: SNOWBOOKS LTD
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fighting Fantasy Gamebooks have been experiencing a renaissance recently. Partially, this is due to nostalgia; Warlock on Firetop Mountain came out 32 years ago after all. Mostly, however, it's because the games themselves are still relevant to modern games design and gaming trends, and also due to a massive surge in interest in fantasy gaming. Fighting Fantasy is just as good as it ever was, but for many of us it has been a very long time since we visited the world of Titan, and a guide book is just what we need.

A solid reference work on Fighting Fantasy has been needed for quite some time, and who other than Fighting Fantasy author and living word cannon Jonathan Green to hunt down all the fine details of this world. You Are The Hero is a lovingly assembled and highly detailed labour of love. Green has produced a great many adventure game books himself and knows the industry inside and out; this makes him the ideal person to track down the big names in the genre, such as Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone. He has also filled the book with the iconic art that delighted the young and terrified the unimaginative back in the eighties. The artists are especially well treated here and there are some rare treasures in this book.

Each adventure gets a chance to shine and every aspect of this huge and popular series is discussed and investigated. You Are The Hero is filled with many tiny stories about inspiration and production. The books aren't so much reviewed as examined; Green's tone is one of reverence and respect, though from a perspective of thorough research. Not a single stone is left unturned; we get the story behind the telephone-based game F.I.S.T., the story behind the weird plastic models that tied into Fighting Fantasy, a look into the Goldhawk series (aimed at younger readers), Battlecards, the Zagor books, Warlock magazine, everything.

Green has produced a beautifully edited and firmly present account of a phenomenon that for some is as important as Transformers or Star Wars and yet has been pretty much overlooked by the mainstream. If you've recently become reacquainted with the idea of turning to page 400 and want to know more about this strangely British fandom, then this is the best place to start.

ED FORTUNE

8

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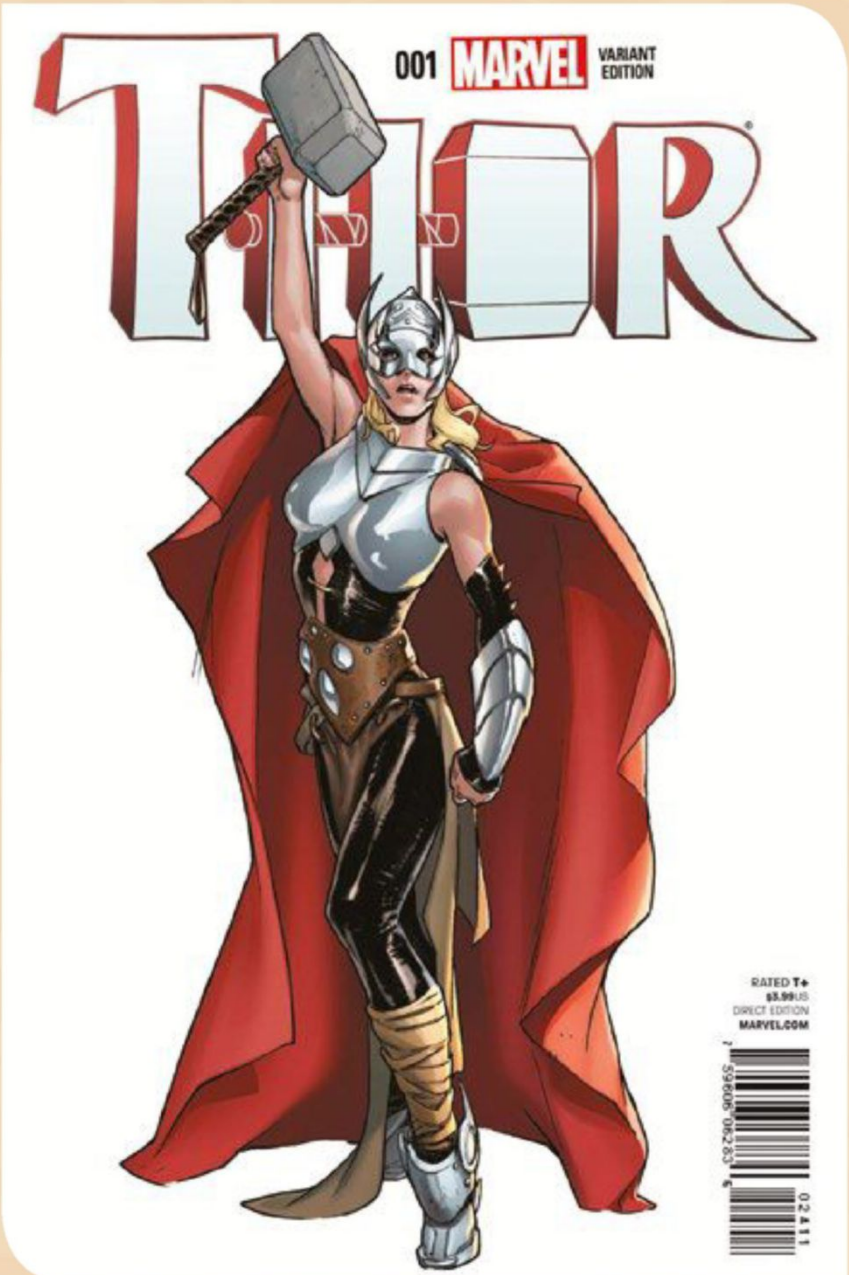
VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



Phew. Following the relative snooze-fest that was September's instalment of the Watchtower (I know a bad workman always blames his tools, but when you're doing Ice Bucket Challenges and finishing on a *Hello Kitty* story, you know it's been a quiet one) we're here, out on the other side. To quote that well-known punk band everyone quotes when it comes to September 30th - wake me up when September ends. Well it's over, and here I am, defrosted, renewed, researched and ready to go.

We kick off October's news with some good fortune for true believers. Fans of Marvel will be familiar with the colourful history between the comic behemoth Stan Lee and esteemed co-creator Jack Kirby. For years, Kirby's estate has fought to see the comics giant receive proper accreditation (and, y'know, payment) for his contributions to such figures as the Fantastic Four and the X-Men. Well, with The Avengers, X-Men, Fantastic Four and their comic book companions scaling new heights in cinematic adaptation (from a commercial element, anyway), it's the least they can do. September brings us the news that Kirby's heirs have reached an amicable settlement with Marvel and Disney, via a million-dollar thank you, outside of court. Well, it's about time. Now, if DC could pull their (Bill) Finger out and sort Batman with some more equal creator credits, we'd be well away.

Well away, like Thor Odinson. How's that for a segue? We all knew that Female Thor was on her way; now she's arrived, with Odinson giving up his trusty Mjolnir (declared no longer worthy, rather) in preparation. *Thor #1* doesn't give us too much information on new Thor, being more concerned with giving Odinson the elbow first. Not that he's going anywhere fast – he may no longer have the hammer, but he's likely to stick around for a while yet, sulking from the sidelines. In the meantime, get used to new Thor – Marvel promises that she'll be in the role for the foreseeable future, from *Age of Ultron* and beyond.

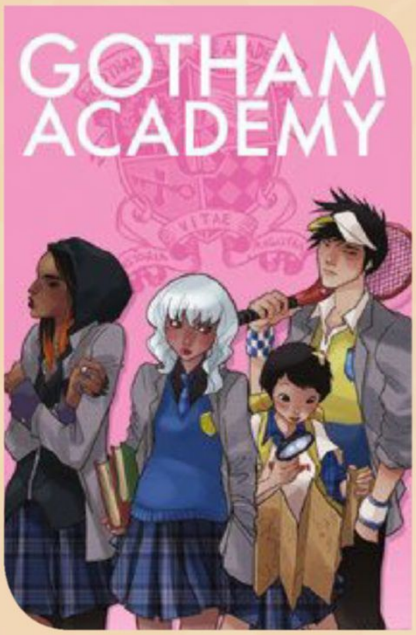
Meanwhile, following the recent success of *Guardians of the Galaxy*, green Guardian Gamora finds herself the latest of the gang to get her own comic book. Fresh in the footsteps of Star Lord and Rocket Raccoon, Gamora is set for a tie-in of her very own, written by the movie's co-screenwriter Nicole Perlman. There's been no definite confirmation from Marvel or Perlman since the announcement, but it looks like a sure fire deal (especially with *Rocket Raccoon #1* selling a record 300,000 copies). Again, this is good news, giving a talented female writer the opportunity to make waves at Marvel, and Gamora a little more exposure. Whoever said it wasn't easy being green? Gamora and the Hulk seem to be doing rather well out of this cinematic Marvel deal (lunchboxes and merchandise for the former not always withstanding). Keep your eyes peeled here for any further developments.

Predictably, we now head to the DC Universe, for a gander at what news we might find there. September might have been a slow one as far as headlines go, but it found the company in fine form, selling a tremendous 3.5 million comics. Some of them were even pretty good, too! Even if most of them do, admittedly, tie

into their big *Future's End* event. We're promised that, as these things often do, it will lead into something even bigger for 2015 – something with 'Crisis' in the title, knowing DC. Indeed, recent developments have hinted that the *old* DC Universe might not be quite over and done with yet, with certain characters from before the New 52 set to make a return, of sorts. Could this see a battle between New 52 Superman and the old one? A brood-off between new and old Batman? Is this DC's way of ushering back in the (still popular and missed) old continuity, or could it be them definitively closing the door? Could we see repairs made to the dodgy (read 'overly aggressive') characterisation of certain characters, or will this be more a 'handing over the torch' type affair? Only time will tell, although it's a fair bet to say that multiversity will probably be involved somewhere down the line.

One such character returning to the fold is Ted Kord's Blue Beetle, showing up in J.M. DeMatteis and Keith Giffen's *Justice League 3000*. He'll be bringing bromance buddy Booster Gold with him in a story set in pre-new 52 Earth's future. Or at least, to confuse you even further, a future that's a lot like the one of the pre-new 52. Lest we forget Beetle was shot in the head by Max Lord. This is great news for folks who like a little more yuks in their books, and a nice counterpoint to the grim gore of a lot of DC nowadays. Although, that said, the publishers have been having a lot of fun, of late.

Gotham Academy sees the return of a long-forgotten member of the Bat-family to the fold: Dick Grayson's Aunt Harriet, best remembered from the sixties *Batman* TV series and comics. Although it makes sense in this *Batman*-for-kids comic, I am surprised that Grant Morrison never tried to bring her back during his stints on one of his various Bat-titles.



We'll close this month's DC stories on a high, with the news of Harley Quinn's scratch n' sniff special being adapted for audiences overseas. *Harley Quinn Annual #1* (on sale October 29) will contain such scents as leather, pizza, fish and a certain mysterious compound which has to be changed before it can ship out anywhere. UK readers will therefore be treated to the odour of freshly cut grass instead of... well, that other kind of grass. It's a fun idea – a comic book which stinks, but in the right way.

Outside of the Big Two, it's somewhat quieter than usual, with less of the big crossovers and headline grabbing stories than we've been accustomed to of late. Tarantino and Wagner are still hard at work on their Django/Zorro crossover (latest news: Zorro will be getting on a bit, Broomhilda and Django separated, the villain based on a real-life historical figure) and the Star Trek/Planet of the Apes mash-up is still a (glorious) thing. You'd expect a bit more horror than I've uncovered, it being October and all, but not so much has been announced at the time of writing – I mean, Titan comics are making a *Penguins of Madagascar* comic, but that's not quite the right sort of scary, is it?

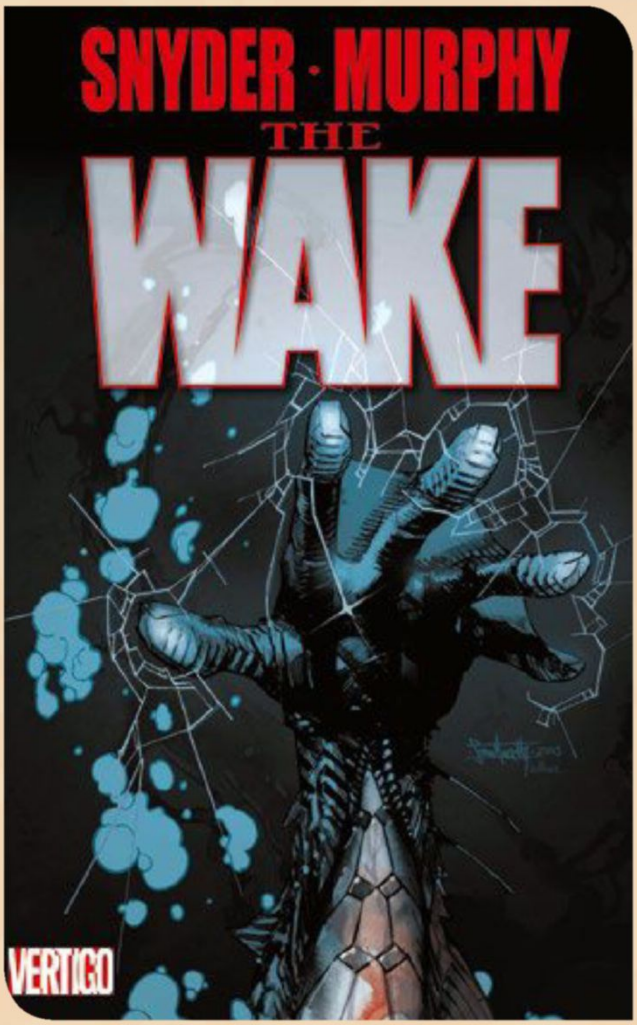
We'll finish with zombies, then – the closest thing to properly scary I could find in preparation for Halloween. Even if no-one else is, *2000AD* are getting into the spirit of things with an exclusive cover by *30 Days of Night* artist Ben Templesmith, depicting Judge Joe Dredd in undead form. The art will adorn the horror-themed Winter Special edition (available October 29th) and promises such tales as *Anderson, Psi Division: Horror Comes to Velma Dinkley* (don't get your hopes up: probably not a Scooby Doo crossover), *Defoe: Frankensteiner*, and *Judge Dredd: Sorebone*. As a revival of the old summer and winter specials *2000AD* used to publish every year, it's a great idea, with Templesmith a welcome addition to the fold.

And, at that, we close yet another month's View from the Watchtower. Stay frosty all...

Joel Harley can be contacted at:
joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com
and tweeted **@joelharley**

REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC BOOK RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



THE WAKE

WRITER : SCOTT SNYDER / ARTIST: SEAN MURPHY / PUBLISHER: VERTIGO / RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 18TH

There has been a growing trend in comic books that also double as movie pitches. Typically these are simple affairs with one or two concepts woven into the story and some of the characters drawn to resemble potential actors. It is rare that you want them to be made into a movie however. Scott Snyder's The Wake is not such a movie pitch, but its cinematic pacing, engaging art and clever plot demands that it be seen by a wider audience, and we expect the adaptation to end up in movie development hell sometime soon.

The plot is fairly complex. For a start, it's told across three time zones; the pre-historic age, the present and the far future. The main, modern day story centres on marine biologist Dr. Lee Archer. She's recruited by the American government to investigate a strange thing they found at the bottom of the ocean; a sentient, man/fish hybrid-like creature that they refer

to as the Mer. Turns out these beings are pretty strong and have hallucinogenic venom. We also discover that the USA has been naughtily stealing oil from the Arctic via a secret underground rig and Dr Lee and a team of misfits find themselves trapped inside this top-secret installation, surrounded by hostiles.

Meanwhile, in the future, a young woman and her cybernetic dolphin struggle to survive in a world that is mostly underwater. She is desperately seeking an edge, a secret, something that could help mankind survive the post-flood world. Snyder skilfully blends these strands together, and isn't afraid to shock the reader throughout. The Wake is (appropriately for a story set in the ocean) very, very deep and filled with multiple layers. It isn't quite as deep as the likes of The Watchmen, but it does get pretty close on occasion. The third strand, the pre-historic plot, is something that needs to be read to be understood.

Sean Murphy's art is, quite frankly, amazing. It sells this deep and complex narrative extremely well and presents every scene in a breath-taking and cinematic way. Unsurprisingly, Murphy won an Eisner award for it, and you can see why. Gorgeous stuff, even when it is being gory and shocking.

The Wake is a long and complicated book, starting out as a science-fiction thriller and then radically morphing into a solid post-apocalyptic adventure. Added to this mix is an interesting take on the alien conspiracy story. If you can only have one graphic novel this year, and you want it all, then you should pick this one.

ED FORTUNE

9

NEIL GAIMAN'S THE LAST TEMPTATION

WRITER: NEIL GAIMAN, ALICE COOPER / ARTIST: MICHAEL ZULLI AND DAVE MCKEAN / PUBLISHER: DYNAMITE / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 21ST

It's likely that you have forgotten that Neil Gaiman and Alice Cooper once collaborated on a wickedly strange comic book. After all, it was twenty years ago and not only was Gaiman less of a star than he is today, the book wasn't a stellar hit back in the day. Dynamite have acquired the rights and squeezed this book into a lovely looking hardcover, on the assumption that both the names Gaiman and Cooper will shift units.

Originally designed to tie-in with Alice Cooper's 1994 album of the same name, the plot of both the album and this book is the same; a young boy called Steven is lured into a strange theatre where he gets caught in the supernatural machinations of a creature that calls itself The Showman. The boy has to resist a series of temptations and the like, all during a Halloween week. The Showman, of course, looks like Alice Cooper and the entire thing is interspersed with snippets of Cooper's songs.

Gaiman does his best to wrap a narrative round the concept, but this is pretty much a straight up ghost story of the kind that most adults will have heard many times before. Despite the two big names on the cover, the real draw here is artist Michael Zulli's detailed and dream-like artwork. Zulli had worked with Gaiman on The Sandman before this book was created and it's very clear that he's used to the author's style. We get a beautifully rendered and dream-like world from the artist, one that fits in well with the narrative. It's sad and gothic in equal measure, lending the entire thing an appropriately sombre tone. It's just such a shame that the story isn't that strong.

Neil Gaiman's The Last Temptation 20th Anniversary Deluxe Edition Hardcover features an interesting (but dated) foreword from Gaiman and an up-to-date afterword from Zulli. The letter Gaiman wrote to Cooper and a sample of the script is a nice addition and actually one of the more interesting bits of work. Over all, this is one for completists; if you simply have to have everything that one of this book's fine creators has ever made then this work will look very nice on your shelf. For the rest of us however, the 90's was a long time ago and best left alone.

ED FORTUNE

5

TRANSFORMERS: WINDBLADE

WRITER: MAIRGHREAD SCOTT / ARTIST: SARAH STONE / PUBLISHER: IDW / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In the IDW version of the Transformers Universe, the war between Autobot and Decepticon has ended. A new peace has swept through the galaxy and the Transformers are getting back to a civilian life. High pitched B-movie villain Starscream is now the mayor of the ancient city Metroplex; a city that is also a giant robot in its own right. Because Metroplex is so big, he needs a specialist who can communicate with him in a certain way. The transformer capable of this is the titular Windblade, a spunky young machine who's trying to do her best despite the strangest of circumstances. Her biggest problem is that Metroplex is ill and she needs to find out why.

Despite the overly-complicated set-up, Transformers: Windblade is a pretty straight forward story. The main character is essentially the only cop in a corrupt city, the mayor wants results and there's conspiracy that runs deep throughout the place. Strip away the robots and the space guns and we get a noir style story about a tough broad who doesn't take no for an answer. It's a lot of fun to see this done with Transformers, and though there's plenty of robot on robot action, mostly it's about the detective work.

Sarah Stone's artwork is appropriately pretty. We get a real feel for a city made out of living steel and there's a genuine thrill in seeing the main characters turn into their machine modes and beat each other up. Windblade is presented in a consistent and interesting way throughout, with Stone's artwork complementing Scott's dialogue very well.

Scott's writing is strong and at times the story is reminiscent of the work of Transformers super-star writer Simon Furman. Windblade doesn't quite do the action scenes as well as Furman, but there is a heck of a lot of potential here and it'll be interesting to see where they go next.

Overall, Transformers: Windblade brings the retro-robots kicking and screaming into the modern day and delivers a story different enough from the rest of the canon to be memorable. Whatever you do, however, don't tell Michael Bay that they are three-dimensional and well thought out female transformers out there; the poor love's head would probably explode. Or worse still, he might try and put Windblade into his next awful movie.

ED FORTUNE

7

2000AD PROG#1900

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER, IAN EDGINTON, DAN ABNETT / ARTIST: CARLOS EZQUERRA, D'ISRAELI, RICHARD ELSON/ PUBLISHER: REBELLION /EDITOR: THARG THE MIGHTY ONE/ RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Like many publications of quality, 2000AD has been around since 1977. Given that it's a serialised anthology comic, you would be forgiven for assuming that this would make the comic impenetrable; after all, with roughly 37 years worth of world-building, it stands to reason that it's going to be a bit involved.

Of course, 2000AD wouldn't have lasted this long if that was truly the case. This is due to frequent issues that function as 'stepping on' points, and issue 1900 is a very fine example of this. It contains only three stories, but they're all very good introductions to the Galaxy's greatest comic.

Judge Dredd: Block Judge is a fine example of why Dredd has lasted so long. Not only is Carlos Ezquerra's art on top form, but also John Wagner is back in the driving seat as scriptwriter. The set-up for this one is simple; the previous resident peacekeeper from one of Mega City One's habitation blocks has died, and Judge Dredd and a small team move in to settle in the replacement. The first part of this story swiftly introduces the main characters, and Dredd's trademark gruffness helps set the scene. The block is going to ruin and it will require blood, action and police work to set it right again. A promising start to a story that is just similar enough to the recent movie to draw new readers in.

Next up is Stickleback : The Thru'Penny Opera. Ian Edginton and D'Israeli have always been a dream team when it comes to creepy and atmospheric stories and this latest instalment of Stickleback is certainly that, given that it begins with a most unconventional burial. The black and white art style suits the story perfectly and is nicely retro.

The last strip is Kingdom: Aux Drift, which follows the continuing adventures of genetically engineered dog soldier Gene The Hackman. Those familiar with Kingdom will be delighted with the new direction the story has gone in, and those who have used issue 1900 to get acquainted with this marvellous post-apocalyptic sci-fi action epic will find themselves fully briefed on the basics by the end of the this issue.

The prog also includes a short history of 2000AD itself, which does the job reasonably well. 1900 is a landmark issue, and we're looking forward to the next big milestone in the comic book's history, that all-important issue 2000.

ED FORTUNE

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HARLEY QUINN VOL. 1: HOT IN THE CITY

WRITER: JIMMY PALMIOTTI, AMANDA CONNER / ARTIST: C. HARDIN, S. ROUX AND GUESTS / PUBLISHER: DC / RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 4TH

Marvel and DC are always copying ideas from each other in order to outdo their main rival and somehow gain the edge. It's a fine tradition, and this time round its DC's turn to take a leaf out of Marvel's book. Namely, the new Harley Quinn comic, Hot in the City, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Deadpool, Marvel's anarchic and hyper-violent anti-hero whose wacky hi-jinks have kept geeks entertained for so long. The result is a book that is barely coherent and constantly breaks the fourth wall.

Harley Quinn Vol. 1: Hot in the City begins with a post-modern round-robin, where Quinn wonders out loud what her own comic book would look like. Cue a series of guest artists each doing a short pastiche of their own work in an appropriately wacky style. For the bulk of the book Chad Hardin and Stephane Roux are on hand as artists and they do seem to have a lot of fun drawing Harley. The result is a pleasing mishmash that is very easy on the eye throughout.

The story is a similar sort of mess , more of an excuse to line up Harley for the next gag or the next splash page. As a result, the plot wanders about all over the place but we do get to see some cool things such as Harley Quinn as a Roller Derby Girl. The book introduces some fun new characters as well, such as an 80-year-old cyborg and wise-cracking (and dead) beaver.

All of the things you'd expect from a Harley Quinn book are here; murder, mayhem and both Harley and Poison Ivy in a series of compromising (but strictly PG-13) poses. The key problem is that Palmiotti and Conner's script isn't funny or clever enough to keep the reader interested for two-hundred-and-twenty-five pages. This is a real shame because the character has a lot of potential for both pathos and humour; indeed, this is the thing that make Deadpool so popular. Instead the creators have gone for the cheap sell; they know people will buy it simply to look at the very pretty art work and laugh at the comedic violence. Harley Quinn Vol. 1: Hot in the City feels like it was written with a list of 'what will sell' in mind rather than actual story and this results in a disappointing book. If you must, buy it for the pictures, not the story.

ED FORTUNE

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PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS IN GAMING BY LEE PRICE

Blizzard Cancels TITAN

It was a game that was seven years in the making but, in the end, it never even saw the light of day. Unfortunately, Blizzard has cancelled the much-anticipated **Titan** after a protracted development period that almost gave **Duke Nukem: Forever** a run for its money.

The game has been pulled as, according to Blizzard, the company simply couldn't match what they had achieved with the mighty **World of Warcraft**. In a statement released by Blizzard CEO Mike Morhaime it was revealed: "*We had created **World of Warcraft**, and we felt really confident that we knew how to make MMOs. So we set out to make the most ambitious thing that you could possibly imagine. And it didn't come together. We didn't find the fun. We didn't find the passion. We talked about how we put it through a re-evaluation period, and actually, what we re-evaluated is whether that's the game we really wanted to be making. The answer is no.*"

It's a lot of work down the drain, with some estimates claiming about $50 million had been spent on the game, but it is likely a wise move on the part of Blizzard. If the team weren't feeling the game then it would be unlikely players would, and if players don't then that's a lot of money being spent on servers for the few that do. It's a shame and will likely lead to a raft of redundancies at the company, however gamers still appear to be more than happy to play **WoW** for the time being and it probably isn't going to be another Blizzard product that knocks it off its throne.

COMING SOON

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PS3, XBOX 360, PC
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 21ST

Finally, after years of waiting and a couple of development delays, gamers are finally going to be getting their hands on the latest in the Dragon Age saga. BioWare's epic fantasy adventure will be looking to right the wrongs of the second title and deliver something that gets the fans as excited as the first title did all those years ago. War between the Templars and the Mages is promised and BioWare are saying this will be the most open-ended Dragon Age yet in regards to story. One to get very excited about.

COMING SOON

LITTLEBIGPLANET 3

PLATFORM: PS4
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 21ST

LittleBigPlanet is perhaps one of the most innovative titles to come out of the last couple of generations of Sony consoles, so it's great news that another title is coming our way. The appeal with this series has always been the level creator, even though the main games offer some quality platforming as well. Players will be able to access any of the creations from the first two games in glorious 1080p and creators will have sixteen layers to play with, rather than the three of previous titles.

DESTINY a Massive Success

Bungie had been banking on **Destiny** hitting the heights of the massive **Halo** series, and early indications are that it is well on its way to not only hitting those heights but even surpassing them.

It has been announced that the game pulled in a whopping $325 million within the first three days of its release, clocking up an astonishing 100 million hours of gameplay in the same time period. This is in addition to the $500 million of sales that were generated on the first day of release alone.

If nothing else, it looks like we finally have a game for the current generation of consoles that is truly taking advantage of what they have to offer. Slowly but surely some top quality IPs are seeing release and **Destiny** has proven that the market is craving new experiences. By the time of going to print, it will be likely that Bungie will have pulled in at least $1 billion.

COMING SOON

HALO: THE MASTER CHIEF COLLECTION

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 14TH

It could be argued that the Xbox One is relying on old glories rather than new IPs with this upcoming collection, which will allow players to revisit the previous titles in the series with updated graphics and play mechanics. That argument would be correct but at the same time you can't argue with the selling power of the Halo series. Will dedicated players purchase the same games they already have? Previous collections have shown that they will, and you can bet there will be plenty of material for the fandom on show.

Microsoft Buys Mojang

It's the news that many a **Minecraft** fan may well have been dreading. Microsoft has purchased Mojang in a deal believed to be worth a whopping $2.5 billion!

You seriously have to wonder if the company is going to be able to live up to that price tag, and we may well see proof one way or the other at some point in the future as the studio has been merged into Microsoft's in-house development team.

Perhaps more importantly, the future of **Minecraft** may be thrown into some doubt with this. For a start, we will finally be seeing the game on mobile devices running a Microsoft OS, though it will be a few years too late to attract anybody who is inclined to buy such a device solely to play **Minecraft**. However, the possibility that Microsoft may well choose to withdraw support for the Android and iOS versions of the game is still there and, while it would be a daft decision, we may wind up seeing the game disappearing from two of the most popular mobile platforms at some point in the future.

The move raises a lot of questions about the future of **Minecraft** and any potential sequels. Is the game really worth the $2.5 billion price tag? We can't help but feel that it's going to be extremely difficult to catch lightning in a bottle twice, so it will be interesting to see what Mojang can come up with to prove their worth.

TETRIS Live Action Film Moving Forward

What? Just what? We don't even... How?

Okay, so in what is bizarre news, a live action **Tetris** film is currently in the works, with Lawrence Kasanoff at the helm. Some gamers may recognise that name as belonging to the producer behind the pretty decent **Mortal Kombat** film. A film made on the back of a franchise that had some semblance of a story, of course.

So... just how on earth is this going to work? Apparently it is going to be a sci-fi epic rather than two hours of blocks falling. So in short, it will likely be nothing to do with **Tetris** and will just be a bog-standard film with the name attached. That's a damned shame as well because there is actually a really interesting story behind the game, how it was created, how the Soviet Union took so much control of the title, and the story around who got to port it to various consoles. That's not the film we'll be getting but it may be worth checking out as a curio if nothing else.

MARIO KART VR Shows the Potential of Oculus

So the Oculus hasn't been officially released and Nintendo will certainly not be providing any software for the fledgling VR system, but that hasn't stopped **Mario Kart** from turning up on development kits (which can be pretty much purchased by anyone) and wowing people with its surprising quality.

Indie developer Wilsonator has crafted a demo of the famous Mario Circuit from the SNES original which allows gamers to race with a brilliant first person viewpoint while taking advantage of what the Oculus has to offer.

It's more than likely this little project will be shut down before it ever really takes off, but the potential shown by it is amazing. The video is available on YouTube for those who want to take a look.

PlayStation Home to be Shut Down

Sony has announced that, come March 31st 2015, PlayStation Home will be completely shut down. The platform is essentially a gaming-centric version of social media, allowing users to create avatars and interact with other home users.

Unfortunately, the company believes that the platform is no longer financially viable, which means that it has to go.

The claim has been refuted by some developers though, with NDreams CEO Patrick O'Luanaigh claiming that his company made seven-figure revenue sums every year using the platform. He commented, "*I still believe that had Harrison stayed at Sony, things may have been very different. But regardless of how you feel about PlayStation Home, no one can deny that it has been an incredible experiment.*"

The truth behind that comment is up for debate, but at one point in time more than 19 million people took part in the platform. That number dropped somewhat following the famous hacking scandal of 2011 when thousands of users' personal information was stolen from the platform and the idea never really recovered after that.

It's bad news for those who still loved the platform, however at the same time it may free up money for Sony to invest into other projects. It will be very interesting to see what comes off the back of this decision.

COMING SOON

FAR CRY 4

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PS3, XBOX 360, PC

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 18TH

The series that was once famous for its amazing graphics is still going strong thanks to a decent third entry. The fourth title will see players taking control of Ajay Khale, who has returned home to the Nepalese wilds to scatter his mother's ashes. Once there, he sees the country embroiled in civil war and gets involved - which will obviously lead to the shooting action that the series has built a reputation for. Apparently, efforts have been made to ensure the open world gameplay doesn't clash with the plot so this may be worth a look, especially for fans of the series.

Former Nintendo Indie Boss Working on Sony Exclusive Game

Dan Adelman, who is the former boss of Nintendo's indie division, has confirmed that he is currently working on the Sony exclusive **Axiom Verge**.

The game, which bears more than a striking resemblance to the **Metroid** series, will see release on the PS4 and Vita before eventually hitting PCs thanks to Steam.

Those with good memories may remember that Adelman was banned from using Twitter following some negative comments he made about the 3DS' region locking back in September of last year. That clearly hit a nerve with the developer, who eventually left the company after signing a deal that allows him to use the social media platform again. As you can imagine, a decent amount of Nintendo-bashing has followed.

Still, **Axiom Verge** looks like it has the potential to be a pretty awesome little indie game and it is obviously steeped in old-school Nintendo culture. It is one to look out for and it may leave the Japanese company kicking themselves just a little bit when it comes out.

Xbox One Launches in China

It's home to over a billion people and yet China has never really been considered a market that the games industry could really expand into, thanks to various social and economic reasons. The near fourteen-year-long ban on foreign consoles probably didn't help matters either.

That may be about to change though, as Microsoft has released the Xbox One in the People's Republic, sporting a launch line-up of ten extremely carefully selected games.

Amongst the games released were **Kinect Sports Rivals**, **Dance Central Spotlight**, **Rayman Legends**, **Forza Motorsport 5**, **Neverwinter Online**, **Trials Fusion**, **Zoo Tycoon**, **Max: The Curse of Brotherhood**, **Naughty Kitties**, and **Powerstar Golf**.

Hardly a who's who of gaming quality, but they will act as the front-guard for a far superior set of games that is apparently also on the way. The likes of **Sunset Overdrive** and **The Master Chief Collection** are scheduled for release, making for interesting times in China.

For their parts, Nintendo and Sony have yet to really commit to expanding into the country. Nintendo especially seems reluctant, though Sony has claimed that the PlayStation brand will make its way over eventually. It's great times for gamers in China and it will be extremely interesting to see if any Chinese development studios set-up in the wake of the news.

COMING SOON

ASSASSIN'S CREED: UNITY

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 14TH

The first truly next-gen Assassin's Creed game is going to be absolutely gorgeous. Of that there is no doubt. The question is will the extra power afforded by the new consoles lead to the game featuring enhancements beyond the merely aesthetic? Well, there is definitely going to be a new combat system as fencing comes to the fore for the latest title, and a new mechanic has been introduced that should make the series' trademark wall-scaling a little easier to handle. It all sounds promising but the final verdict won't come until November.

COMING SOON

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WARLORDS OF DRAENOR

PLATFORM: PC, MAC

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 13TH

It's hard to believe that after so many years the World of Warcraft MMORPG is still going as strong as it ever has done. It's truly testament to the remarkable achievement of the folks at Blizzard that the title still offers plenty for gamers to immerse themselves into. The Warlords of Draenor expansion pack will feature worlds and characters from previous Warcraft games to really get fans of the series salivating. Look for this to be a major seller.

Nintendo Turns 125

On September 23rd one of the biggest names in gaming celebrated another landmark birthday. It has certainly come a long way from Hanafuda cards and love hotels (don't ask...).

The company, which is still estimated to be worth somewhere in the region of $80 billion despite the recent struggles of the Wii U, didn't really do anything of note to celebrate the occasion, but we are sure plenty of gamers are reliving one of the many classics produced by the company in their honour.

Here's to another great 125 years!

FINAL FANTASY VII is Back... In Bike Form

Square have continued their efforts to hate all of the money in the world by announcing that, instead of remaking **Final Fantasy VII** and satisfying the cravings of millions of gamers worldwide, they are releasing a game based from the (admittedly pretty cool) motorbike section of the original game instead.

Said motorbike section lasted for all of about ten minutes and now you will soon be able to play a nice updated version on your smartphone.

Officially titled **Final Fantasy VII G-Bike**, the game will be free to download, but will feature the dreaded micro-transactions that so many of us know and love. Hopefully there will be a decent selection of courses, with Square describing the game as belonging to the action-chase genre.

Now to go back to waiting for news about a proper remake.

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REVIEWS

THE LATEST GAMING RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED

DESTINY

DEVELOPER: BUNGIE / PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION / PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PS3, XBOX 360 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After much hype and expectation, the most expensive videogame of all time is finally here. Mass Effect meets Fallout by way of Halo in the vaunted Destiny, a new-fangled, shiny next-gen MMO that has quickly become one of the flagship titles for Playstation 4 and Xbox One. Well, clocking in at £310 million (making Grand Theft Auto V's £165 million look positively restrained by comparison), so it should. Is it worth it, or could the developers at Bungie have better spent that money elsewhere? On a decent script, for example.

At least some of that money is accounted for in the game's all-star cast, which takes in such big sci-fi and fantasy names as Peter Dinklage, Bill Nighy, Nathan Fillion, Peter Stormare and a couple of minor Walking Dead alumni. Sure, Dinklage sounds bored most of the time, but it's hard not to appreciate the presence of Tyrion Lannister himself, tipsy from a few too many honeywines.

Thankfully, the Dink's sluggishness doesn't carry over to the gameplay, which is frantic and often frustrating. A fast-paced futuristic first person shooter, Destiny will take you from futuristic Russia to the Moon and beyond, blasting away at the game's various alien villains in a breathless, frequently panicked fashion. That gunplay will see you through the first twenty levels (character building levels, as opposed to the more literal kind) which act effectively as one long tutorial, your character quickly accruing experience, gadgets and pretty pieces of armour and weaponry. Of particular interest is your Star Wars-esque hoverbike, upon which it is immense fun to dart about the various landscapes of Russia, the Moon, Mars and so forth. Some of the environments can be a little samey (particularly the dingy industrial indoors) and empty, but there's no denying the beauty of of its scenery. This is most evident taking your first steps on the Moon, from which you can observe our own planet, gently rotating. And then the shooting starts again, just in case you were worried about too much romanticism getting into your FPS action.

The setup will be familiar to many videogame veterans: a choice between three basic classes: Titan, Warlock and Hunter, each offering a slightly different style of gameplay (basically, brute force, magic or stealth). The following character builder gives just enough choices for self-expression, even if your character will be covered in silly futuristic armour for most of the time - non-combative, third-person visits to the social hub space station notwithstanding. Dinklage and Bill Nighy explain the story as it is. This doesn't take too long; a vague space opera type affair in which you play an all-important sci-fi superhero, accompanied by your trusty robot companion Tyrion – 'Ghost' - who

gently guides you on your way. 'Gently' being the operative word. Some might say lazily. You'll spend much of the first act waiting for the story to kick in, or some guidance other than 'go over there/kill those bastards/loot that thing/protect that other thing'. There's some crossover from Bungie's famed Halo games (occasional lapses into third person and a mild space marine vibe) but it doesn't have the attention-grabbing immediacy of that beloved franchise. Bear with it, Bungie and this review beseeches you: it will be worth it.

You see, Destiny is very much a game of two halves; the first all levelling up, upgrades and repetitive raid/protect missions. With the level cap set at a relatively low 20, so ends what passes for the game's narrative. From there, it opens up to the 'real' multiplayer experience; big, cinematic raids and events, best played in teams of 3-5 now experienced players. Although casual gamers will get a kick from the undeniably pretty graphics and satisfying battle mechanics, Destiny wasn't designed to be played and traded in quick succession. No, like your Fifa, Call of Duty or even World of Warcraft, it'll be most appreciated by those willing to put in the time and – crucially – socialise.

Bungie have put a lot of work into ensuring the game's players keep coming back for more, with constant upgrades and grinding (even beyond the level cap), modifiers, events and vendors which can only be activated at certain times or days. Brand new DLC events are already inbound, meaning that fans should be kept salivating until the inevitable sequel. At the same time, it doesn't bother pausing to consider the more casual gamer. It asks you to trust that it'll be worth your time, and doesn't really stop for reassurance during the initiation period. For those who prefer a little more story with their spectacle, or the multiplayer ambivalent, Destiny may be a lost cause. Like its equally superficial movie counterpart Avatar (in that was also one of the most expensive movies of all time) the story is awful. Maybe even worse. Those who can connect with it, however, should find themselves very quickly addicted. For a relatively new system like the PS4 or Xbox One, it's comforting that we should have something with such playability to see us through the droughts between classics.

There's a definite sense of style over substance to Destiny, sneakily papering over the cracks in its non-existent narrative with slick gameplay and gorgeous graphics. It may not be as great as it could or should have been, but it's still bound to go down in history as one of this generation's successes. Such is the nature of destiny, I guess.

JOEL HARLEY

7

MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOWS OF MORDOR

DEVELOPER: MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS, BEHAVIOUR INTERACTIVE / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORMS: PC, PLAYSTATION 3, PLAYSTATION 4, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Curiously lacking Lord of the Rings in its title, Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor is a release which takes tried and tested ideas then puts its own spin on them.

With a story which is already making fans of the lore froth at the mouth, the player steps into the shoes of Talion. A ranger tasked with assisting the garrison of the Black Gate at the time of its fall, he is saved from death when a botched ritual fuses him with the wraith of an elf lord of the Second Age. Out for revenge in the name of his dead family, Talion walks a very dark and dangerous path through the wastes of Mordor.

Fans of Batman: Arkham City will immediately pick out some distinctly familiar elements here; the combat, stealth system and certain open world elements having taken heavy inspiration from that title, with even an odd variation of detective mode available for use. However, rather than presenting itself as a cheap copy with a fresh coat of paint, what's present here builds upon these with new concepts.

Chief among these is the nemesis system and how the title deals with death. In his determination for revenge, Talion can interrogate, assassinate, mind control and manipulate the hierarchy of the orc forces. By targeting specific leaders he can trigger in-fighting among their ranks and feuds, setting up the situation he needs to find the Black Númenóreans he is hunting. Your presence and impact will be recognised down to minor details, from certain wounds struck upon them to recalling killing you in a past engagement.

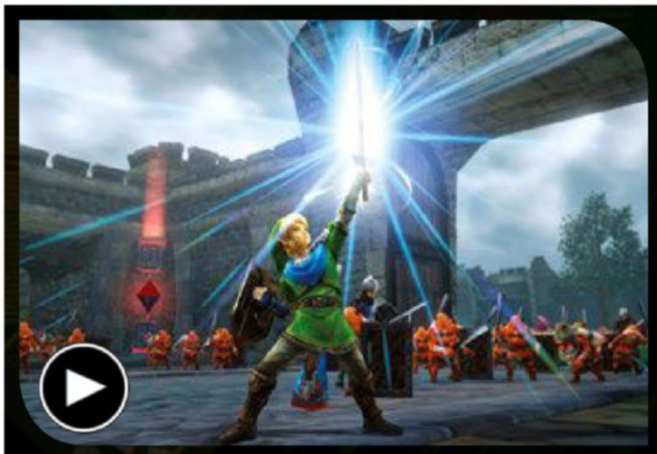
The title's actual fighting mechanics are extremely well refined, a very good thing given how combat orientated an experience this is. While counters are a key part of combat, unlike Assassin's Creed they do not make you invincible and the game will not hold your hand in fights. There is absolutely nothing to stop you throwing yourself into a fight far above your tier, and you can easily stumble upon situations where flight is your only option.

If there is a truly notable failing for this title, it's that the side-quests are unfortunately repetitive. While the title's content is excellently paced, the final few hours do start to wear thin. This is something not helped by the story ultimately boiling down to a surprisingly generic tale of revenge despite the lavish mo-capped cutscenes. Better diplomatic mechanics and relying less upon the game's codex for in-depth lore would have significantly helped in both regards.

If you are after another fantasy open world title, Shadows of Mordor will be well worth your time, but there are certainly a few better ones out there.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

8



HYRULE WARRIORS

DEVELOPER: OMEGA FORCE, TEAM NINJA / PUBLISHER: KOEI TECMO, NINTENDO / PLATFORMS: WII U / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Playing out as the Crisis on Infinite Earths of the Zelda franchise, Hyrule Warriors sees a new threat arising in Hyrule. Falling to the dark influences of Ganondorf, the sorceress Cia opens the Gate of Souls, a portal to various points throughout the timeline. Now the heroes of Ocarina of Time, Twilight Princess and Skyward Sword must ally to prevent the Triforce from falling into Ganondorf's hands.

As you might have guessed from that description, what's here is little more than an excuse for gratuitous fan-service but it's hard not to grin as the nostalgia kicks in. From the classic themes to remade locations, what's here is everything a Zelda fan would want despite the shift to a far more combat focused experience of fighting vast armies.

While the core gameplay itself ultimately boils down to Warriors-style button mashing through waves of mooks, the developers took steps to make battles far more visually rewarding. Rather than just slashes, hacks and the odd air-juggling from combos, each character offers their own set of gratuitously explosive abilities, from summoning machine-gunning deku sprouts to giant pillars of ice.

Delivering these is less about simply whaling on an especially heavily armoured foe until they fall and instead exploiting openings in their defences. Dashing past a darknut or lizalfos after it's overreached itself opens up a summoning gauge which must be rapidly depleted before a special attack can be made. It gives the title more substance than some of the other Warriors titles out there, requiring a little more strategy and timing than the average release. This is enhanced by the occasional classic boss fight which calls back to the same strategies originally used to defeat them, with all the expected secondary weapons putting in an appearance.

This said, this is still a Dynasty Warriors game and anyone lacking interest in that series will find little to really offer them here. If you've yet to enjoy a release from Omega Force's past efforts, this one is not going to sell you on their big franchises. While picking it up might seem appealing, the experience will likely wear thin long before the end. Furthermore, even without comparing it to the modern generation there are definite points throughout the title where the Wii U's dated hardware shows through. While beautifully animated, odd issues such as the strings on Zelda's harp not moving during the opening cutscene can immediately take you out of the experience.

This is very much a love it or hate it title with little middle ground, but any lifelong Nintendo fan should give this one a look before delivering their verdict.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

8

THE SIMS 4

DEVELOPER: EA MAXIS, THE SIMS STUDIO / PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS / PLATFORM: PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ahh, The Sims. Everybody knows The Sims. Some people love them, some people loathe them, and some people are just downright creeped out by them.

Here's the real question though. Is The Sims 4 good enough to stand up against the powerhouse that was The Sims 3?

Firstly, the big standout thing is that the Sim world isn't one big world any more, but split into neighbourhoods. This has massively reduced loading times, which the Sims 3 was infamous for (it took ten minutes to load a world!) As well as this, the previously nightmarish Create-A-Sim now runs like a dream. There is one niggling complaint we have with the Create-A-Sim that many others have: The absence of Create-A-Style. However, given as they decided to drop it in order to improve the quality of this game, it can be overlooked. At least they have a legit reason for it.

Which is more than can be said for the lack of pools (apparently, pools are being added free of charge in November so we can stop complaining about that now) and toddlers. Due to technological limitations (new AI systems and such,) we haven't seen them in the base game. Seriously? These things have been in since the dawn of Sim-Time, when the Big Sim Bang created the Simiverse. Since the Sim Asteroid hit planet Sim, creating an extinction event and killing off the DinoSims. Don't worry; I'm sure everyone will be enjoying their Sim toddling days with a £50 Toddler Expansion Pack, no doubt arriving sometime in 2015...

On to the gameplay. This is the meat of the Sims and honestly, the whole "weirder stories" thing? Nonsense. This is the most regular game of Sims released yet. We'll just have to presume that as more and more expansion packs come, the game will get wackier. Which is... kind of a rip off.

The main new feature of The Sims 4 is the introduction of emotions. These emotions change the way your Sims walk and talk, thus changing the events that unfold in your life. If you've just walked in on somebody in the toilet, you're going to feel embarrassed, and most likely will fail at any attempts at flirting (or taking a shower, one assumes...)

Remember saving in The Sims 3? Yeah, we went there. We know all you Simmers are sucking air through your teeth and wincing at the thought. Saving was a big deal. Now, it barely takes 15 seconds, which means you can save before every interaction, so your Sim doesn't die, or something.

The Sims 4, as of now is good, but not as good as The Sims 3. So many things are missing, you find yourself feeling short-changed. That *could* be to do with being spoilt with all the expansions of The Sims 3 (this reviewer had eight of them) but it's hard to shake the feeling. However, it does seem like a solid entry into the series, improving on lots of things. We love the new emotions, and also, there's a "Geek" trait. So that's us covered.

TOM ACTON

6

RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT THE WORLD OF RETRO GAMING BY CHRIS JACKSON

Licensed to Thrill

There was a long period of time when it seemed like every game based on an already-popular franchise would turn out to be a massive disappointment. Often hastily rushed out to cash in on the success of their source material, licensed games earned themselves a reputation as something to be avoided at all costs. The 8 and 16-bit eras were a particularly rough time for tie-ins, with hundreds of casualties including *Bill & Ted*, *The Wizard Of Oz*, *Friday The 13th*, *Total Recall* and even poor old *Barbie*. And let's not forget Atari's *E.T.* game from 1982, which was so awful that its abysmal sales almost killed the videogame industry and lead to truckloads of unsold copies being buried in a New Mexico landfill site...

It wasn't all bad though. One company in particular - Japanese/American developers Sunsoft - seemed to know exactly what they were doing when it came to bringing fan-favourites to home consoles.

BATMAN (NES/MEGA DRIVE, 1990)

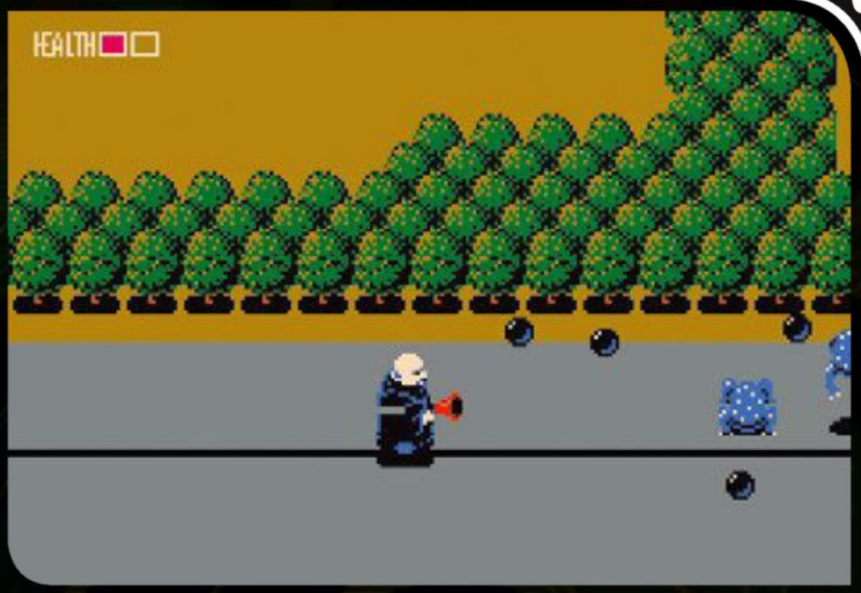
Sunsoft were responsible for a fair few Batman titles, and pretty much all of them are worth a look. Based on Tim Burton's 1989 movie, *Batman: The Videogame* on the NES is a wonderfully atmospheric platform/beat 'em up hybrid, challenging in places but consistently satisfying. *Ninja Gaiden*-style wall jumps and a variety of different weapons all add to the excitement, but some players might deduct a couple of points because the plot of the game strays quite far from events of the film. If you're a stickler for that sort of thing, you might be more impressed with the Mega Drive version which sticks closer to its source material and also adds extra gameplay in the form of side-scrolling shoot 'em up levels. Yes, you can blow up tanks in the Batmobile and shoot clowns out of the sky from the comfort of your very own Batwing! It's crazy to think that developers are only just getting around to doing that sort of thing on current-gen consoles. Trying to make the most of the licence while they had access to it, Sunsoft released *Return of the Joker* on the NES in 1991 and would later release a version for the Mega Drive titled *Revenge of the Joker* in 1992. You'd almost think they were going out of their way to come up with confusing titles just to amuse themselves. *Return/Revenge of the Joker* is bigger and bolder than the previous Batman game, with the Mega Drive version being understandably much more pleasant on the eyes and ears. Based on the then-current comic book interpretation of the character and featuring more of an emphasis on platforming than the previous title, *Return/Revenge*... offered fans a slightly different take on the never-ending battle between Batman and the Joker. The Mega Drive versions of these games are probably the ones to look out for if you fancy giving one a try, purely because they're a bit more flashy, but the original NES *Batman: The Video Game* will always be found pretty high up on our all-time favourites list.

FESTER'S QUEST (NES, 1989)

The Addams Family is the source of quite a few underappreciated titles, which also includes a couple of fairly similar but equally pleasing platformers on the SNES and Mega Drive. *Fester's Quest* is a particular favourite though, with its ridiculous plot and wide array of

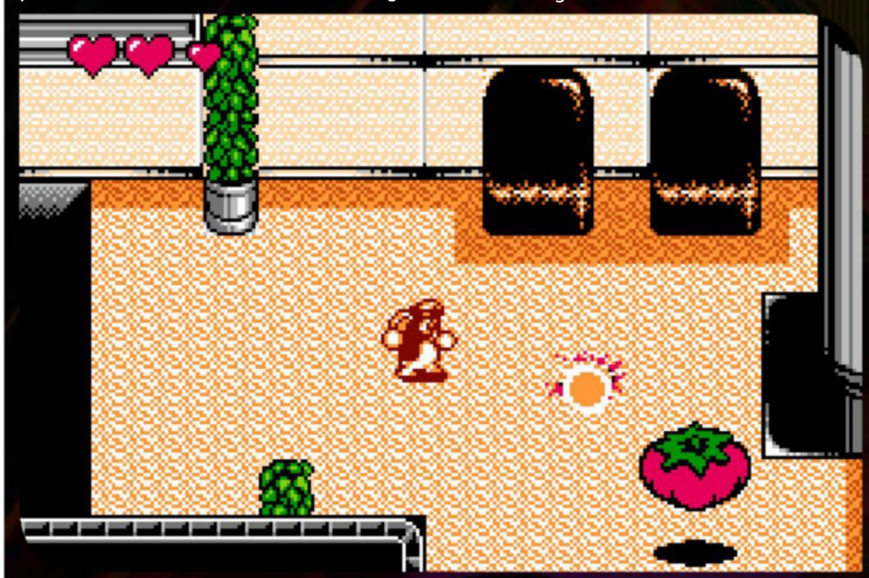
infuriating baddies. What appears to have happened is Fester went out one night and got absolutely roaring drunk, during which time he witnesses an alien invasion and decides to be a hero and save the city.

This involves travelling around town shooting an assortment of brightly-coloured alien frogs, blobs of green slime that multiply when attacked, and floating disembodied heads which spit insects whose attacks can slow your speed down to a rage-inducing crawl. Defeated enemies drop useful items such as weapon upgrades (and downgrades, so watch out for those!), money (which turns out to be useless, but never mind), and keys to open buildings and light bulbs so you can see once you get inside. It's absolute chaos. Exploring buildings is essential for getting through the game. Some might contain one of several family members who happily provide you with new weapons or upgrades which will be necessary for tackling later parts of the game. Other buildings feature 3D mazes with all kinds of concealed items, and then finally, we have the "dungeon" buildings. These contain scrolling levels full of baddies to shoot your way through before coming face to face with one of five alien bosses. Get through all five (including a big final battle against the mothership "brain" which can, unbelievably, be beaten by just positioning yourself in a safe spot and firing homing missiles into the air), and congratulations! A winner is you. Completely daft, and difficult to the point of almost being unbearable at times, this might be one of those games that you'll either really, really love or absolutely detest. Two thumbs up from us though!



GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH (NES / GAME BOY, 1990)

Ahhh, *Gremlins 2*. One of the greats! While the Game Boy received a fairly standard side-scrolling platformer, Gremlin-loving NES owners were treated to something really quite special. Instead of following the plot of the movie, Sunsoft did something different and used the game to try to fill in parts of the film that we didn't get to see. What that means is players start the game with Gizmo being shoved into the Clamp Center's ventilation system by the evil Gremlins, and your task is to make your way through the building to wipe out all the big boss Gremlins. It might not be the most imaginative plot in the world, but the amount of ideas they managed to squeeze into the actual game make it a truly outstanding title. Things start off pretty weirdly as one of the first enemies Gizmo encounters is a particularly large and murderous variety of tomato. Seeing as your only attack to begin with is a tomato projectile weapon, you end up killing tomatoes with tomatoes. Then the rats and bats start joining in, you're flinging tomatoes all over the place, and all of a sudden you find a power-up and start bouncing around on a pogo stick wiping out everything in sight. It's absolute madness in the best sort of way. Each stage is set in a different area of the Clamp building; giving the levels a unique look and making each one feel different to the last. Defeating end of level bosses gives you a new weapon to use in the next level, until the subsequent boss fight provides you with something different. New traps, hazards and enemies are introduced regularly as well, so you never get bored of having to jump over the same set of spikes again and again. Before you know it, you'll be struggling across a conveyor belt which is moving in the opposite direction to where you want to go, while trying to time a jump over a swinging ball of spikes at the same time as clearing a big patch of rogue electricity and hurling paper clips at a Gremlin who is flying haphazardly around the screen with the aid of one of those little hats with a propeller on the top. Totally having another go on it as soon as I've finished writing this! Add in shops to buy weapon upgrades or extra lives, some really nice looking cutscenes for the time, an awesome soundtrack, and loads of other vicious baddies that there isn't enough room to mention, *Gremlins 2* isn't just a highlight of licensed gaming titles, it's a highlight of gaming full stop. Play it!

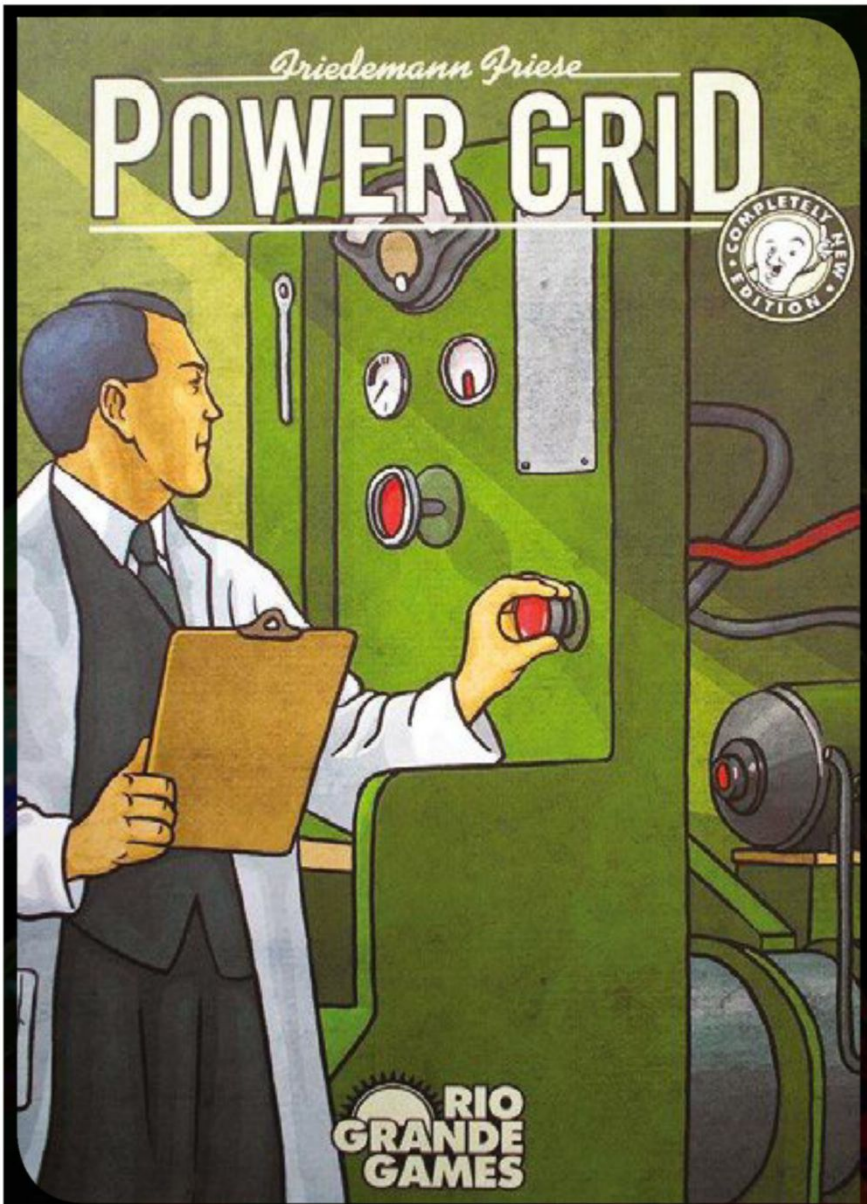


Before we leave you alone for another month, a word of warning - not all of Sunsoft's licenses were as good as these! *Death and Return of Superman* is a repetitive beat 'em up bore, *Scooby Doo Mystery* looks lovely but makes very little sense, and *Road Runner's Death Valley Rally* could have been great (run through levels as fast as possible while avoiding Wile E. Coyote and the traps he's laid out for you) but is let down by ridiculously floaty controls that do the gameplay no favours whatsoever. Ending on a more pleasant note though - *Speedy Gonzales: Los Gatos Bandidos* is pretty great, but not quite remarkable enough to devote any more than a couple of lines to. Explore levels, find power-ups, eat cheese, and rescue your mates. It's a bit like *Sonic the Hedgehog*, but you're a mouse instead of a hedgehog...

That'll do for this month. Two thumbs up to Sunsoft and all their hard work back in the '90s. We'll cover a few of their original titles in future issues, but for now we're off to eat. Before midnight...

ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE GUIDES YOU THROUGH THE REALM OF TABLETOP GAMING



OFF THE GRID

Last month, I had a solid go at trying to deflate the monolithic monster that is *Monopoly*. One of my points was that it wasn't a very good game (in general) and for a game about handling money, taught some terrible lessons. Mostly, the way to make cash in *Monopoly* is through arguing and swindling and though that might appeal to a wunch of bankers, there are better games for that. There *is* a game out there which is perfect for learning and exploring the idea of building up a monopoly and taking control through financial manipulation however; it's called *Power Grid*.

Designed by the award winning Friedemann Friese, this complicated-looking but surprisingly simple game actually does what *Monopoly* only claims to; it's about seizing corporate control and being the sole controller of a particular resource. As the name suggests, the commodity in question is electrical power; you and your friends vie for control of a nation's power stations. The game is German, so the default map is Germany. (This also means that one of the towns in the game is Essen; if you look at a lot of board games, Essen turns up regularly. This is because there is an international games expo in Essen every year, and sticking Essen on your board has become a running gag. It's for this reason alone that if the UK should ever have its own board game expo, they should hold it in the Yorkshire town of Wetwang.)

The aim of the game is to provide power to as many different cities as you can. Players bid on types of power stations, some more efficient than others. You gain money for each region you can supply power to, and you build connections from city to city. The more efficiently you can supply power, the more money you make. After a few turns, your control of a particular region's power supply begins to encroach on another player's monopoly. At this point you both race to find the best way round the board without spending too much precious cash.

This is a game about managing cost, making budgets and bluffing. At the start of the game, the less useful stations are the first available to buy. Typically, these are also hungry for fuel, and you also have to buy fuel to put in your power station. If you bid wisely and are a bit lucky, you can get the best power stations. Coal and oil stations are cheap to begin with, and in plentiful supply. You need to buy coal and fuel to power the stations and make money, but fuel becomes more expensive the more scarce it gets. Obviously, the best option is a power station that requires no fuel, so this is a game where even Daily Mail-reading NIMBY types want to get their hands on wind turbines.

You might be wondering how a game about budgeting can be fun; well, it's all in the way you try to outthink and out-bluff your fellow players. This is a game about picking your moment and purchasing wisely. Instead of the utterly random elements of *Monopoly*, the

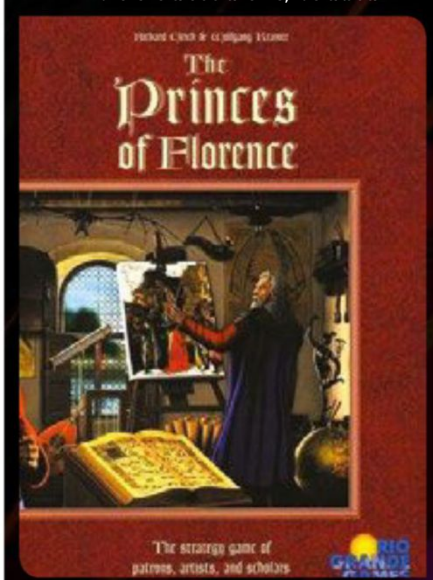
player gets rewarded for thinking ahead and out-thinking their competitors. The way power stations become available for auction means that you're always thinking about the next big purchase, and looking for ways to get the best deal before your fellow players do. Expand too quickly and you'll be disadvantaged in bidding, spend too lavishly or unwisely and you won't make enough cash to catch up with your initial investments.

You can also try and corner one resource. Buy lots of nuclear power stations and buy as much uranium as you can store, for example. There is certainly a winning tactic in being slow, steady and reliable. Personally I find it more fun to infiltrate my fellow players' territory as quickly as I can.

Unlike Wall Street-style simulations (such as *Stock Market Tycoon*) or dull auction-argument games like *Monopoly*, this game focuses the responsibility for success on the player, making it truly competitive. When played with younger players you get some great insights into the world of money; stuff that we grown-ups take for granted. This isn't a game about balancing cheque books though; it rewards bravery and punishes foolishness and just like real life, it's often hard to find out where the line between the two is.

The map provides a number of strategy elements as well, but handling power and cash is the key part of winning here. Other boards are available for those obsessed with maps and simulation, and the UK board is particularly good. Various boards add variant rules into the mix; the Australian board makes Uranium a trickier resource to manage, whereas the Brazilian board replaces garbage with biogas. Sometimes the maps just add a regional shift in tone; for example, the UK and Ireland board is very well done and introduces tidal power. There is also a board called 'Robots' which is designed for solo-play; although the main charm of this game is the social side.

And there is a social side; it's a board



game after all. Despite the initial complexity, once it's understood and played through, future games will run along clean rails; the board is laid out in such a way that the various rules and game mechanics are pretty easy to manage. Still, if you're intent on introducing this to a family environment (and it does work well with families) then you should not attempt to play it straight out the box with people who don't 'do' board games. Unlike the Germans, we Brits don't have a long-running tradition of family board game evenings, and aren't terribly adventurous. Play this game with friends first, get comfortable with the rules and then get one or two family members to join in. Eventually, it will draw in anyone who likes playing games, but with its myriad of counters and big map it does look complex to the uninitiated.

The game originally began life as a thing called *Funkenschlag*, and fans of *Power Grid* are advised to avoid this predecessor. *Funkenschlag* is quite random and poorly balanced in places, suffering from too many elements at the top of the game and not enough content toward the end. Those who enjoy the negotiation aspects of *Power Grid* may also want to consider *The Princes of Florence*. It's a different sort of game with a very different theme, but shares one key element; the idea of waiting patiently, building up resources and then going all out. We'll talk about it in a later column, but in terms of subtle planning and obvious fun, it's very similar.

Power Grid is a family game, though one that is squarely pitched at teenagers and older. Though the subject matter feels dry, it's absurdly fun to see that there's a bargain on the table and then plotting to see how you can be the one to own it. It's fun, but also sneakily educational, which is always nice. Of all the games that combine world domination with shopping (and there are quite a few) *Power Grid* wins hands down.

Ed Fortune can be contacted at **ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com** and tweeted at **@ed_fortune**

PAUL MOUNT'S TV ZONE

This month TV Zone looks at the extent of EXTANT, ponders the highs and lows of new DOCTOR WHO and takes another cautious peak UNDER THE DOME...

We shouldn't really be too surprised to find that an actor of Halle Berry's calibre - *Oscar-winning* Halle Berry, if you please - has taken to starring in a TV series. Over the last few years she's spent her time hanging around in the background in various *X Men* films or else taking the lead in sloppy thrillers like *The Call* (what were they *thinking* of in that last half-hour?). Of course, TV has long since stopped being viewed as the 'poor relation' in Hollywood and some of the biggest stars in the world are lining up to appear in big, sprawling expensive long-form dramas which are surely far more creatively satisfying than two hours spent in some piece of fluff movie blockbuster. What is a bit surprising, perhaps, is that Halle Berry should have chosen a science fiction vehicle to launch her onto TV screens. Fortunately *Extant*, airing on CBS in the US and available for streaming via the Amazon Prime service in the UK, isn't *Transformers: The Series*, but rather a slow-burn conspiracy thriller set in an edgy day-after-tomorrow future. *Extant* is powerful, intelligent, thought provoking and, above all else, a refreshingly mature and adult series which never has to resort to tiresome cussing and pointless titillation to pull in an adult crowd. *Take note please, Mr Chris Carter...*

So here's what's going on. Halle plays Molly Woods, an astronaut just returned from thirteen months on a solo research mission on a space station. During her tour of duty she receives a strange visitation - the image of her long-dead boyfriend Marcus, who appears suddenly from out of thin air and starts to get a bit frisky. On returning to Earth she's a bit peeved - and not a little surprised - to be told that she's pregnant. This is a shock because of the aforesaid solo space mission and the fact that she and her hubby John (Goran Visnjic) have given up on any hope of having a 'natural' family due to her infertility. They do, however, have an 'artificial' son, Ethan, a 'humanic' android programmed to act, react and behave just like any human child. As Molly tries to adjust to being back amongst her family after months in space and come to terms with the fact that she's impossibly pregnant, things start to get even stranger. As Molly tries to find out exactly what's happened to her and, more to the point, how and why, it soon becomes obvious that Molly's baby is something very special and apparently very extraterrestrial.

Debuting on Amazon Prime the day after each episode aired in the US, the whole series is now available for binge-viewing. Now I'm not really much of a binger (Wispa Gold obsession notwithstanding) so I'm proceeding through the series at statelier pace, but I'm hugely impressed with what I've seen of the show so far. This is very much a classy piece of proper science fiction, dealing with those themes which producers often wheel out when they feel the need to justify the fact they're actually working in the geek genre. But *Extant*, in truth, really is all about 'what it means to be human' and how important it is that we hang on to and protect that humanity as we rush deeper and deeper into the deep, dark pit of rampant technological advancement and willingly expose ourselves to things we don't understand and things we can't explain or rationalise. In the show's opening moments, Halle tells us that this is a story about "the Earth, about family and about survival" which probably gives those of us working our way through the series a pretty fair, if broad, idea where it's all heading.

Perhaps not surprisingly, with its

main themes of artificial intelligence and sinister alien infiltration, *Extant* is executive produced by Mr Steven Spielberg. But this is neither as mawkish or fanciful as *AI*, his previous foray into the world of human-like robots and with thirteen episodes to play with the story has the space to breathe; to establish its discreet vision of the near future - smoother-running cars, ubiquitous tablet-based computer technology, wafer-thin transparent mobile phones - without resorting to some of the cheesier extremes of the genre. This is a show which takes its time, layers its mysteries, develops its characters and isn't afraid to tease out its story rather than dump it fully-formed onto the audience. The show's really lucked out with its cast; Berry is on top form, clearly relishing the chance to properly develop a believable character in an extreme situation, and she's ably supported by Visnjic as Molly's robotics engineer husband John, Michael O'Neill as her steely, ruthless boss Alan Sparks and Pierce Gagnon, creepily convincing as robot boy Ethan.

Full of twists, turns, intrigue and duplicity, *Extant* is a perfect fit for the paranoid generation. It's a show which is impossible to properly second-guess and we don't know who to trust or even believe from one episode to the next. But what becomes clear about halfway through the series is that humanity itself is under threat not only from something inexplicable but also, perhaps, from science itself as it dares to tamper with the sanctity of humanity. With the genre still obsessed with ferocious alien monsters, killer robots, time travel, and superheroes, it's hugely refreshing to be able to watch a more measured and respectable science fiction television series which not only has a decent, gripping story to tell but which treats its audience like thinking adults and not drooling adolescents waiting for the next explosion or big CGI set piece. There's very little here in the way of spectacle

but plenty of good old-fashioned storytelling which, in the best traditions of classic science fiction, actually engages the brain by having something to say about the human condition. To put it another, much simpler way, *Extant* is quite simply *excellent*.

DOCTOR WHO

Having been complaining for some time that recent seasons of *Doctor Who* have been a bit like a private party I'm looking in at from the outside - everybody's having a great time except me - I'm finding that things have moved on a bit as we power through Series Eight. (Bear with me, this analogy is likely to get a bit tortuous.) I'm in through the door now, I'm mingling with the cool kids at the party and I'm generally enjoying myself and having a hoot. But I can't help complaining that the some of the music's a bit repetitive and the dips are off. No wonder I don't get invited to many parties...

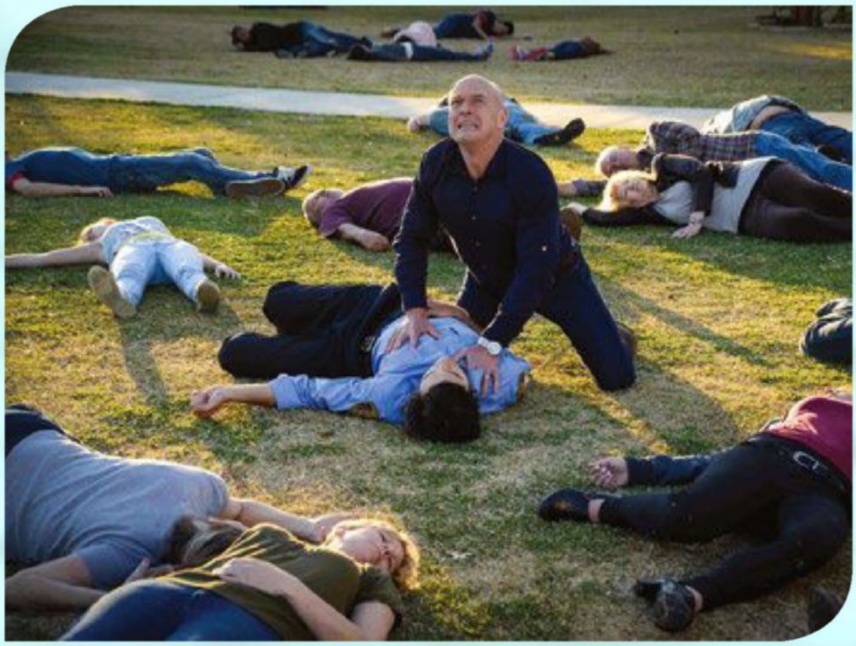
Let me make it quite clear that I'm thoroughly enjoying the new *Doctor Who* series. As I mentioned last month, I'm utterly won over by Peter Capaldi, who's brought a wonderful and welcome waspish wit to his interpretation of the Doctor. Jenna Coleman's Clara finally feels like a real person rather than a joke-machine cypher and I'm warming to her former soldier/teacher boyfriend Danny Pink (Samuel Anderson). Their relationship is natural and rather sweet, and I particularly love the spiky banter between the Doctor and Clara who's now become the Doctor's on/off travelling companion. But dammit, something's still not *quite* right...

I fear that Mr Capaldi, much like his excitable predecessor, is being sold a little bit short in the actual story stakes as the season trundles on. There's not been a clunker in the six or seven episodes screened so far (i.e. at the time of writing) - **Time Heist** left me a bit cold - but neither has there been anything truly extraordinary. The show's not yet knocking it out of the park, as

someone more irksome might say. The stories have all been solid, reliable, workmanlike efforts but they're stuck to a rigid and predictable formula and, slightly unsettlingly, it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to imagine Matt Smith's Doctor bounding through these episodes. Peter Capaldi's not yet been given the chance to really make his mark on the show in stories radically different from those we've had in the last three seasons. We've had a couple of comedies, a Dalek episode, a quirky but slightly dull spacey sci-fi one and Moffat's **Listen** which seems to have made the greatest impact amongst the Who cognoscenti. Typically, I can't share in the fangasm over this one because it all seemed a bit Emperor's New Clothes to me, Moffat dragging us into his preferred default 'fairytale' model for the show which the first few episodes seemed to be shaking off. Atmospheric, well-directed and quite clever in a 'look at me' sort of way, **Listen** was very much Moffat's Greatest Hits, with a bit of Russell T Davies's far superior 2008 scarer **Midnight** thrown in for good measure. But the bigger picture I'm trying to paint, I suppose, is the suspicion that, if not for Capaldi's fantastically spiky Doctor, this would seem like a very underpowered and samey bunch of stories, a series struggling to get out of first gear when it should really be soaring to fresh heights with a new man at the helm of the TARDIS.

This is potentially dangerous. Any change of face for the Doctor in the 'new series' environment is likely to be tricky. The last three Doctors have been charismatic and instantly likeable; Capaldi's Doctor is a harder sell and there does seem to be some resistance from what we might loosely describe as the 'casual' crowd to his somewhat frostier portrayal. Audiences who have become accustomed to the more eager-to-please and easier-on-the-eye (no offence, Mr C, don't flare those attack eyebrows at me!) Tenth and Eleventh Doctors might be finding number twelve a little harder to get along with. Casting against expected 'type' is a hugely brave move for a show which has built up such a broad appeal over the last eight or nine years and I'm hoping that those who have flown the nest since the series started - and there *are* signs of some audience attrition - will give our new guy another chance and get to warm to him as, hopefully, he in turn starts to become a warmer character.

But what's particularly needed are some really *great* stories, killer-not-filler episodes which get people talking about the series again, excited about it, surprised, shocked by it and – yes - just *watching* it again. The Doctor trading snarky quips with Robin Hood or chasing a robot around Coal Hill School with a broom is all well and good, but we've seen stuff like this time and again over the last few years. It's especially important that a show which is now over nine years old - ancient in British TV drama terms - innovates and develops as stagnation just encourages the audience to drift away because it's just repeating itself and looks as if it's run out of steam.



I'm not suggesting that *Doctor Who has* run out of steam - by its very nature that's virtually impossible. But it's in a bit of a narrative trough at the moment when it really needs to be flying high and striking out in new and surprising directions. Steven Moffat has indicated that the show's new style starts to 'bed in' around episode seven - that'd be **Kill the Moon** by Peter Harness, a few days away as I write this column and which, I suspect, may well render much of what I've written here redundant. I do hope it does, and that the Capaldi era *proper* is about to start. I'm enjoying *Doctor Who* this year, much more than I have since around 2010, but I'd much rather it excited me again, got my heart (just the one) racing again; just generally thrilled me again. *Doctor Who* really is such a great show that just being *good* never seems quite enough.

UNDER THE DOME

Having jumped ship from *Under the Dome* during its first run last year because it was just So Damned Dull, I thought I'd at least give the thing the benefit of the doubt and take a peek at Season Two, airing on Channel 5 in the UK. Oh. The people of Chester's Mill are still stuck under a big dome. It's still So Damned Dull. Bye.

Contact me via the magic of email at ***paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com*** *or do the Twitter thing -* ***@PMount***

it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

"Cowa Blunder!" – Yeah on my annual pilgrimage to the real Sin City I managed to catch up with **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**. The future of Eastman and Laird's love progeny sadly ain't that inspiring.

As almost a polar opposite to the box office genocide delivered by the US audience to the **Sin City** sequel, and in almost defiance of a batch of favourable reviews, **TMNT** has proved to be a sizeable hit despite overwhelmingly negative word of mouth amongst critics. The movie has courted controversy pretty much from the moment it was announced. First the truncation of the title to *Ninja Turtles* quickly followed by the plot reveal that the Turtles would be of alien origin this time around, proved to be simply too much for die-hard turtle fans. For a franchise that managed to deliver a still-born movie flop (**TMNT**) only seven years ago, I was surprised by the size of the outcry. But mass outcry there was, hastening a two-year shit bag shuffle that saw the title quietly revert back, amidst the deletion of the word alien from any synopsis. There was also the boringly predictable outcry over the fact that Michael Bay was producing. Due to reasons I have explained on more than one occasion (most recently in STARBURST #404), the inclusion of Bay to me suggested there would be lots of action sequences and that I was probably not going to be treated to a detailed examination of the harshness of humanity towards outsiders. In other words, it might just be enjoyable. The choice of director caused me much more cause for concern - Jonathan Liebesman. I just think this guy is a bit rubbish. His moronic debut back in 2011, **Battle: Los Angeles** was actually the first movie reviewed on the **STARBURST Radio Show**, and quite rightly it was exposed for the brainless and boring specimen it was. I was not in a hurry to catch up with old Jonny boy to see how his career was progressing. Despite all of this, I was still confident that it could turn out to be an interesting new take on a bunch of characters that I still had a soft spot for.

I must admit the longevity of these fellas has managed to surprise me no end. Back in '84 when I greedily bought four copies of **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles #1** had no idea that it would hit what I always refer to as a *rage* phase in '89-'90, and become a global phenomenon. Even my school friend got in on the act. He was arrested whilst drunk. Having broken into a fancy dress hire shop in Stockport – he was dressed up as Donatello when the police shone the torch through the shop window. "Cowabunga, Cried Raider!" was the headline. As you can imagine, he was a very young man who soberly paid the fine, moved on, but never quite managed to erase the credibility scars left by that purple bandana…

The turtles unintentionally bring the wrong kind of New York vibe to Australia...

The original **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** movie I just loved, warts and all. It was also Jim Henson's last outing, which furthers that affection. So I was hoping for the best, and ignoring the fan boy whinging (although it's hard to ignore the bizarre Australian "9/11" version of the poster!). The most irritating of these whinges has been the criticism of the new look of the turtles themselves. It's hard to believe that saddos have nothing better to do than create websites devoted to Photoshopped versions of the new turtles, complete with more retro looking faces. It seems that the addition of some nostrils was just too much for some people. My best advice for them is to spend a few hours in a dark room thinking about what sort of person *knows* what a mutant turtle *really* looks like. So what is the end result?

TMNT is sadly a bit of a disappointment. It's a really small movie, with a tiny narrative. Unlike Bay's last outing, **Transformers: Age of Extinction**, this movie does not have the benefit of an epic feel. There is so little content in this flick that it's almost spoiler proof. You've already read everything in the synopsis.

News reporter April O'Neil wants to get promoted, so she mooches about looking for the elusive Foot Clan. She finds them, and also spots one of the turtles taking them out. No-one believes her at work. She then turns up at a Foot Clan attack on the subway, the turtles intervene and she follows them to a rooftop where she finally comes face to face with them. Because of their renaissance names she realises that her genius scientist Dad created them. Her bosses still don't believe her and she is fired. Gob from **Arrested Development** takes her to her Dad's lab where she meets his old lab partner. The turtles take April to their sewer lair, as their mentor Splinter thinks she is in danger now. Shredder and Co. have a plan to release toxins into the city, and they find and attack the turtle's lair. Leonardo, Donatello and Michelangelo are captured. April, Gob, Splinter and Raphael attempt to rescue them from the Lab. After which, they escape down the snowy mountain in the sequence that they have milked to death in the trailer. Everyone then meets at the villain's HQ to have the final battle. And that is it!

As I said it's a tiny narrative. Hardly anything happens in this movie, and it all races along on autopilot, with literally only a forty-second scene with the turtles in an elevator providing any character development whatsoever. This is a prime example of the difference between a

I'm not buying it, in more ways than one...

fast-paced movie, and a rushed movie. It's not like it's all bad though. I really don't have a problem with the CGI incarnation of our amphibian buddies. This outcry as to them being ugly and unlikable is quite strange (although hearing Michelangelo perving over April is *way* too creepy. "*I can feel my shell tightening*"- first time I've heard it called that matey!) . But surely, the whole point always was that they are all freakishly different, but underneath just a bunch of normal teenagers. Is that not the point of the whole pizza obsession? Why do they have to be cute looking? Talking of pizza, Pizza Hut don't do this movie any favours with their bloody cringe worthy *mythical* 99 cheese pizza. Oh, and before I move on. There isn't a Pizza Hut in Manhattan – so there!

Cast-wise, it was nice seeing Gob from **Arrested Development**, William Fichtner was great as April's Dad-friend, and I thought Tohoru Masamune made a decent fist at being Shredder. *Buuuuut* Megan Fox plays the daughter of one of the most intelligent scientists on the planet. Read that carefully. It looks and sounds strange doesn't it? That's because it really kinda IS. Let's have a quick trip down memory lane and relive some of her greatest hits…

"*I'm horrible to live with. I don't clean. My clothes end up wherever I take them off. I forget to flush the toilet. Friends will tell me, Megan, you totally pinched a loaf in my toilet and didn't flush.*" [At least Winona Ryder only pinched clothes.]

"*I don't want to have to be like a Scarlett Johansson - who I have nothing against, but I don't want to have to go on talk shows and pull out every single SAT word I've ever learned to prove, like, 'Take me seriously, I am intelligent, I can speak.' I don't want to have to do that. I resent having to prove that I'm not a retard - but I do.*" [Yes, you do!]

"*If you eat Chinese food, your farts come out like Chinese food. If you eat Mexican food, your farts come out like Mexican food. And milk, it's like - you can smell the warmth in the fart. My wardrobe on* ***Transformers*** *always smells like farts, and I have no idea why.*" [Ok weirdo…]

"*I think people are born bisexual and they make subconscious choices based on the pressures of society. I have no question in my mind about being bisexual. But I'm also a hypocrite: I would never date a girl who is bisexual, because that means they also sleep with men, and men are so dirty that I'd never sleep with a girl who had slept with a man.*" [I wasn't confused sexually *until* I read that!]

Yeah, when you need a credible A-lister to play a mad scientist's offspring it's only natural that you turn to the Foxster. Maybe this casting is "Hitler's" revenge strategy?

Now we have to address that old bugbear of mine – *The Closed Universe*. The inability of a writer to simply accept coincidence, and instead have every character intertwined, and the villain's motives connected directly to the origins of the main protagonists. I didn't like The Joker killing the Waynes in Burton's **Batman** back in 1989. Similarly, I despised the linking of Oscorp to the origin of Spidey in the **"Amazing" Spider-Man** movies. Random coincidence is something we are not intelligent enough to cope with, so here it is again, with April literally raising the pre-mutation turtles. A very small and circular story. All wrapped up with a cutesy bow on top. This could have been much better, instead it turned out to be just an empty shell.

If I needed something to make **TMNT** seem like a masterpiece, I didn't have long to wait. In what seems like record time, the series **Gotham** has arrived to tell us the saga of the early days of Bruce Wayne, James Gordon, and a host of others, in the years before Batman arrived on the scene. I can understand that the success of **Arrow** has shown that a gritty, edgy superhero show can succeed and also the previous success of **Smallville** has shown that the early years of a hero can be a story worth telling. The problem with exploring the early years of Batman is that Wayne only ever becomes Batman once he dons the cowl –pure and simple! The young Clark Kent is a story worth telling, as his powers are starting to manifest. In fact, the early years of Bruce Wayne only became a proper part of the canon with Miller's **Batman: Year One**. **Batman Begins** also featured the early years but wisely didn't dwell on it for too long. There are only so many scenes you can take of a young moody sod in a monastery trying to do a one inch finger punch on a grain of rice, whilst balancing on his left bollock.

With **Gotham**, my worst fears have been matched, and raised. It's almost unwatchable. **Gotham** has shit bag shuffle encoded into its DNA, as it awkwardly contorts itself in order to include everything but the character we really want to see. It's a show that has a weird hyper-reality aesthetic and tries to be painfully hip. It has strange, budget-munching camera shots that add nothing, and a timeless setting that merely comes across as confusing. Then we have to tolerate the condescending manner in which a bunch of future players in the bat mythos are cameoed one after another. Corey Michael Smith and his crap Jim Carrey schtick is an insult to your retinas, whilst the Poison Ivy cameo is enough to make you reach for a weed killer martini. You would think that the impressive cast would redeem some of these shortcomings, but I can't imagine what directions they are receiving. Only Ben McKenzie as Jim Gordon seems to realise that it's not panto season. Unlike the infuriating mockney version of Alfred that Sean Pertwee is clearly honing as a CV for Guy Ritchie. Then we have kitty Catwoman. Wandering around, sitting on walls looking surly with swimming goggles on. This is one kitten sorely in need of drowning in the bath tub.

To add the final annoying cherry on top, of course the Waynes were murdered due to a *huuuuuge* conspiracy. Not a random act of violence. Of course not. *sigh*.

This show is truly dire. Even their obvious rescue plan of teasing us into sticking around long enough to see Jim Gordon's fiancée and Renee Montoya lezzin up for some rug-munchin' flash backs isn't likely to save this mess.

Jordan Royce can be contacted at
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com
and hosts the Starburst Radio Show
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